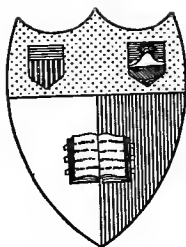


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COLLOQUIES ON PREACHING

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COLLOQUIES ON PREACHING

BY

HENRY TWELLS, M.A.

HONORARY CANON OF PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL
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COLLOQUIES ON PREACHING.



COLLOQUY THE FIRST.

THE RECTOR AND THE VICAR.

SCENE : *The Study of a Country Rectory.*

V. Why, my good friend, I find you surrounded by manuscripts and proof-sheets. What learned work is shortly to electrify the world ?

R. I have recently made up my mind to publish some sermons.

V. I am delighted to hear it. Somehow I am not often either pleased or edified with published sermons, but I am quite sure it will be otherwise with yours. Not only the old and valued neighbour, but the earnest and

thoughtful teacher, will speak from those pages.

R. What do you think I am going to call my intended volume?

V. I cannot guess. Most titles, more or less obvious, have been already appropriated. Of 'Questions of the Day,' 'Problems of the Age,' and so forth, we have had enough and to spare. 'Village Sermons,' 'Parish Sermons,' and 'Plain Sermons' are commoner still. Have you hit upon anything new?

R. I am going to call it 'Lost Labour.'

V. What a singular title! May I ask——

R. I have spent much time over these sermons. My whole mind has been thrown into them, and my best powers of composition and illustration. Yet I never heard of their doing anyone the slightest good.

V. Dear me! I should have thought——

R. So should I, but I have been undeceived by the roughness of facts. As far as I know, not a single member of my congregation has ever altered an opinion, or changed a

habit, or put away a fault, in consequence of my preaching. Whether the explanation be inefficiency on my part or carelessness on theirs, I will not pretend to say. Is my delivery very bad?

V. No, indeed: decidedly above the average. If you are not listened to, who is?

R. I am printing this selection from my unfortunate sermons in the hope, though a faint one, that when read they may be more useful than when heard; and perhaps the name, 'Lost Labour,' may help to draw attention to them.

V. I am inexpressibly grieved and shocked at what you say. Yet when I come to think of it, it is certainly remarkable that sermons, speaking generally, have so little practical effect. What were those words of yours just now? 'Altered an opinion, . . . changed a habit, . . . put away a fault.' It is impossible to avoid momentarily applying the same test to my own feeble efforts, immeasurably inferior, I am conscious, to yours. I—I am

sadly afraid that--that—if I were to try to place my finger——

R. You seem somehow disinclined to finish your sentence. Of all ‘Lost Labour’ in this fallen world, surely there is none more sorrowful and disastrous than the ‘Lost Labour’ of sermons. Fifty thousand of them must be preached every week in England and Wales by the clergy of the National Church alone. O the time, the learning, the consultation of authorities, the throes of intellect and imagination which are expended on their production ! Yet what does it all come to ?

V. Theoretically one would be disposed to say that they constitute a lever for good, scarcely capable of being over-rated.

R. Theoretically, yes. Think of fifty thousand political lectures being delivered simultaneously on one side, not to say repeated week after week, and year after year ! How certain the other side would be that, unless they made corresponding efforts, their cause would be lost ! But people hear political

lectures with a view to action. They hear sermons, or pretend to hear them, without the faintest view to action.

V. Sermons do occasionally influence of-fertories and collections.

R. Ah! well, we will make a little excep-tion there, though the great majority of people give just what they had intended to give, whatever may have been the force of the appeals addressed to them, and though the amount is miserably disproportionate to their means. But I am speaking of tone, temper, character, faith, holiness. If these things could be weighed, how much are they periodi-cally improved by sermons?

V. It is impossible to tell. I need hardly remind you that the kingdom of God cometh not with observation.

R. No, and yet it must be absolutely im-possible for the kingdom of God to come with power, without the effects being more or less visible. Drunkards must surely be seen to leave off drinking. Profane persons must be

known to abandon swearing. The good must be observed to grow more good, and the bad somewhat less bad. There must be from time to time a perceptibly larger attendance at God's house and God's altar. Now what weighs me down, as regards my own people, is, not merely that results are fewer and smaller than I could wish, but that, as a matter of fact, I can discover none at all.

V. That is dreadful.

R. Dreadful indeed ! I lie awake at nights thinking of it. We know the disappointment of agriculturists at what is reckoned to be a deficient harvest. If the yield is ten, twenty, thirty per cent. under the usual average, there are downcast looks, and there are heavy hearts. But what would they say if there was no harvest whatever ? what would they say if, as they cast their eyes over their broad acres, they could discover not so much as a single stalk of corn, where they have ploughed deeply and sown freely ? Have people no pity for God's spiritual husband-

men ? Are they to plough and sow year after year, and never reap the fruit of their labours ?

V. Beyond all question, the English pulpit is not the power it ought to be.

R. We seem to fail in the preliminary condition of arresting and maintaining the attention. A preacher's doctrine may be excellent, and his advice admirable, but if he is not listened to, he fights like one that beateth the air. It is a curious speculation—no, I would rather call it a melancholy misgiving—how many in an average congregation are actually taking in the words of an average preacher five minutes after he has commenced speaking to them. I am clear that the thoughts of a startling proportion are travelling in a very different direction from that in which he is trying to lead them.

V. Do you think it is so bad as that ?

R. One day last year, I accidentally took into church a sermon I had preached the previous Sunday, and did not discover it till I was in the pulpit. Unfortunately I am not

an extempore preacher, and was compelled to go on, but I had just time and presence of mind to alter the text. Well, not a single person found me out.

V. That is to say, not a single person mentioned the matter to you. But perhaps delicacy——

R. Delicacy ! Delicacy in our excellent but outspoken squire ! Delicacy among our farmers and tradesmen ! Why, if a solitary individual had discovered it, the story would have been all over the parish, and I should have heard of it right and left. Do you suppose there was such delicacy as that in my own wife, or in my Oxford son, or in my Girton daughter ? How they would have enjoyed chaffing me, if they only had the faintest notion of the misadventure !

V. It sounds incredible.

R. O ! my wife was probably intent upon household difficulties, and my son was absorbed in some approaching athletics, and my daughter was deep in — well, let us say

mathematics. The squire, I know, was soon fast asleep. I saw the doctor contemplating his engagements in his pocket-book. If the educated section of my congregation were thus indifferent, can I marvel that the others were no better? Yet I did credit that sermon with points. You will do the same, I hope, when you see it in print. Nice encouragement to a preacher to take pains, when he has a sort of conviction that it matters very little what he says!

V. My most excellent of friends, you are growing cynical.

R. Pardon me if I speak with some bitterness. Believe me, I often ask myself how far the fault is my own. You tell me that my delivery is not bad, but I know that I cannot thump the cushion or throw about my arms. Such things may be natural in some men, but they would be offensive acting in me. The arresting and maintaining the attention is not, I am aware, to produce of necessity a beneficial effect. To hear is not to obey, and even

to admire is not to go home and practise. But the arresting and maintaining attention is like the first stage of a long journey. It may be but a small proportion of the whole ; yet where would the whole be without it ?

V. I cannot but think and hope that sermons, let me say your own in particular, are more listened to, aye, and remembered, than you seem to suppose. Of course I am unable to account for your never having been told, even by your own family, of that misadventure, and can only imagine that the atmosphere must have been more than usually heavy on the occasion, or that some other conditions conducive to intelligent attention must have been absent. But I assure you that I have often heard your parishioners speak of your sermons, not only in general terms, but in detail, in a way which appears incompatible with a chronic indifference to them. I have even had occasional outlines of them given me, and unexpected views of familiar texts commented upon. The preacher is frequently the last man

to hear of the impression produced by his efforts.

R. The smallest crumbs of comfort are acceptable. At the same time I observe you do not tell me of any good things done, or bad things left undone, through what I have said.

V. On the general subject, I think you push your desponding views too far, though I acknowledge that there is a great deal to justify them, and though I wish with all my heart that preaching had a firmer grip upon our congregations. You talk of the small results of fifty thousand sermons. Yet look upon the matter from another point of sight. Suppose these fifty thousand sermons to be no longer delivered. How long would it take for true religion to die out of the land? My belief is that services, and hymns, and even sacraments, could not save it; no, nor the best efforts of the writers of books, tracts, and magazines.

R. That thought is new to me.

V. It does please God to deny many of us the intense gratification of seeing much definite outcome from our labours in the pulpit. 'Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at Thy word we will let down the net.' It would be distinctly wrong to slacken our exertions; on the contrary, we ought to ask ourselves whether there may not be methods of preaching to which we have failed to attain; methods scarcely perhaps better in themselves, but better suited to the days in which we live. But while endorsing your remark that results, if great, could not but make themselves felt, I must nevertheless express my intense conviction that the day of judgment will bring to light many beneficial consequences of our ministrations of which we have not the slightest suspicion. May I tell you an anecdote?

R. By all means.

V. A friend of mine, a layman, was once in the company of a very eminent preacher, then in the decline of life. My friend

happened to remark what a comfort it must be to him to think of all the good he had done by his gift of eloquence. The eyes of the old man filled with tears, and he said, ' You little know ! You little know ! If I ever turned one heart from the ways of disobedience to the wisdom of the just, God has withheld the assurance from me. I have been admired, and flattered, and run after ; but how gladly I would forget all that, to be told of a single soul I have been instrumental in saving ! ' The eminent preacher entered into his rest. There was a great funeral. Many pressed around the grave who had oftentimes hung entranced upon his lips. My friend was there, and by his side was a stranger, who was so deeply moved, that when all was over, my friend said to him, ' You knew him, I suppose ? ' ' Knew him,' was the reply. ' No ; I never spoke to him, but I owe to him my soul ! '

COLLOQUY THE SECOND.

THE LAWYER, THE DOCTOR, AND THE
MERCHANT.

SCENE : *Outside a London Church, the congregation retiring.*

L. O dear !

D. What is the matter ?

L. That sermon !

D. I did not hear it. In view of the possibility of being called out, I always sit towards the end of the church. The enunciation of our good vicar is so indistinct, that where we are it is practically impossible to follow him. The strain of trying to do so is positively painful, and I have long ago given it up. He is sufficiently loud, but his words run into one another and cannot be disentangled.

L. There you are ! These parsons do not observe the ordinary laws of elocution. What right has the bishop to present a man to a big London church who cannot be heard in it ? But you had no loss. The sermon was the dullest of the dull ; yet it lasted half an hour by my watch.

D. Why don't they let us have the prayers without a sermon ?

L. Not one in ten would go to church. There's the odd thing. Nobody likes sermons ; but very few listen to them. The inefficiency of our preachers has unfortunately made them a standing target for ridicule. Yet it is considered right that sermons should be preached, and that people should be present. It is a sort of Sunday penance. We endure it how we can, and then we feel that we have done our duty.

D. But ought a sermon to be a penance ? Is not that the fault of our spiritual pastors and masters ? I have sometimes heard preachers to whom it is a pleasure to listen.

L. They are few and far between in the Church of England. It is wonderful to me that ordinary congregations are as large as they are, considering the intellectual pabulum with which they are fed. Generally speaking, it is mere child's pap, and even when it is somewhat richer food, it is nearly always spoilt in the delivery.

D. Yet what a vantage ground a preacher has, if he only knew how to avail himself of it ! A secured audience, a conventional silence, the greatest of all subjects, the impossibility of anyone replying.

L. Yes, yet our reverend blockheads are content to go on, year after year, mumbling compositions scarcely up to the mental level of an average schoolboy. I am no advocate for disestablishment and disendowment, but is it for this that our glorious fabrics are built, and our funds provided ?

D. Recent church progress has not affected preaching as one might have thought it would. Services have been brightened, hymn-

ology has been materially developed, all the other accessories of public worship have been marvellously improved. Yet sermons scarcely seem to have made a corresponding advance.

L. On the contrary, they have positively gone back. With some knowledge of facts and opinions, I can confidently affirm that the London pulpit has considerably deteriorated during the last quarter of a century.

D. But surely there is more extempore preaching than formerly ?

L. Extempore preaching is not of necessity improved preaching. No doubt a good extempore sermon is delightful. But what can be more jejune than the utterances of many young fellows who get up into the pulpit, and fancy that because they have left their notes behind them they must needs be popular preachers ?

D. Why is not more trouble taken to train our clergy to be speakers ? If they knew a little less Latin and Greek, a little less mathematics, or even a little less

theology, but few of us would discover it. We all discover that, as a body, they are no preachers. Till a man is able to fasten the attention of an ordinary congregation for twenty minutes or half an hour, he really ought not to be allowed to mount the pulpit.

L. Don't you think that ten minutes, or at the outside a quarter of an hour, would be sufficient ?

M. I have been listening to your criticisms with great interest. May I put in my little oar ?

L. Certainly.

D. We shall be much indebted to you. The subject is one in which I take great interest.

M. It seems to me you have been rather hard upon the parsons. Oratory, remember, is an exceptional gift. I am as sorry as you are that our excellent vicar is not a more attractive preacher, and I think somebody ought to tell him that he is badly heard down the church. But I cannot agree with any

estimate of him that would set him down as not worth listening to. Dare I ask you if you have much studied the book of the prophet Ezekiel ?

L. I ! Well, no, I can't say that——

M. Do you think that the book of the prophet Ezekiel would repay study ?

L. I dare say it would ; indeed, as part of the Bible, of course it would. Unfortunately one has not time for these things.

M. The sermon this morning was a careful analysis of the book of the prophet Ezekiel. It was not popularly done, I allow ; but still the date of the treatise, its writer, its objects, its remarkable characteristics, its leading illustrations, all received intelligent notice. Towards the end the preacher applied many of its lessons to the present age.

L. You mean that, if I had tried to gain some information from the discourse, which I candidly confess I did not, I might have succeeded.

M. I am not presuming to blame you, a

thing I have no earthly right to do. Let me even apologise for my questions. Perhaps, however, you will permit me to say that, as regards myself, I had no distinct idea till now of the book of Ezekiel, and that I shall go home and look into it with much interest. I wish I could be as certain that I shall profit by the very practical advice given us at the close of the discourse.

L. But you must agree with us about sermons generally.

M. I am not sure. I agree that they might and ought to be better, but the same might be said of most human efforts. Excellence in any and every department is rare ; we are obliged to be satisfied, as a rule, with mediocrity. I am not prepared to admit the standard of clerical proficiency is below that of other professions ; I am perhaps even inclined to think it may be above it.

D. We will readily allow the admirable example set us by the main body of the clergy, their self-denying labours, even, with few

exceptions, their social qualities. But their sermons!

M. I frequently hear debates in the House of Commons. Here we have six or seven hundred of the picked men of the country. Well, I don't find the ordinary level of oratory in that assembly superior to that to which we are accustomed to hear in the pulpit. The dreariness, the repetition, the incoherence, the lack of fluency, strike one as productive of more gapes and yawns than the poorest sermons

L. Ah! the House of Commons is not what it used to be.

M. The House of Lords is more decorous; but, with the deepest respect for it, I am constrained to confess that we don't always gain in intellectual enjoyment by crossing the big lobby. We should be considerably startled to hear in church such stuttering and stammering as I have often listened to in both Houses. Of course, there are brilliant exceptions. These are like the stars of the

pulpit, the men who draw crowded congregations, and hold their audiences in breathless attention. But the average of rhetorical ability in the great senate of the nation is not high.

L. I have certainly been disappointed with my visits there.

D. So have I, except on one occasion, when I heard a set-to between the leaders. Many of the speeches are positively ungrammatical, and would never do to be literally reported. There is often a slipshod character about the debates which to strangers is actually startling.

M. The other day I strolled into the Law Courts. My curiosity led me to pass from room to room, and I heard some of the leading counsel of the day. I was not profoundly impressed with their performances. There was much indistinctness of utterance, and the arrangement of their material seemed to me in more than one case to do but scant justice to their clients.

L. The acoustic qualities of the Law Courts are notoriously bad.

M. And so are those of many churches. Are such facts to be held as valid excuses for lawyers and not for parsons?

L. As for oratory, the judges don't care a straw for it.

M. No, but the juries do ; and surely even the judges have no particular predilection for all that fumbling and hesitation, which suggests, I cannot say how truly, that briefs have been scarcely looked at, and that scanty pains have been taken in preparation.

L. The leading barristers are so overwhelmed with work that it is no marvel if they sometimes come into court a little under-primed.

M. And are no town clergy overwhelmed with work? Then take public meetings of all sorts and descriptions. How seldom we hear a really good speaker!

L. You are not so much defending the

clergy as criticising other classes and professions.

M. I am merely venturing to suggest that we have no right to expect from our parsons a degree of merit in speaking which is apparently unattainable elsewhere. As a strong churchman, I should much like to see the influence of the pulpit extended. Our bishops should look to it. Young men in training for holy orders should be more practised in methods of composition, clearness of articulation, and all the qualities which combine to make preachers. Nay, if many of our existing clergy would take greater pains with themselves, instead of being satisfied with their present proficiency, I am thoroughly persuaded that their congregations would reap great benefit. They have no notion of the few who listen to them, and of the many who might be made to do so. But in the meanwhile we laymen must not pull our parsons over the coals without looking nearer home. Is our ideal of sermons a right one? Don't we expect them to interest

us rather than to instruct us? Have we not come to look upon a dull sermon as a bore, and a lively one as a treat, but neither the one nor the other as a means for doing us good? You will not think, I hope, that I want to turn preacher myself if I make the trite and obvious remark that the usefulness of a sermon is at least as much dependent upon the attitude of the hearer as upon the efficiency of the man he hears. I suppose if we went to church in a right frame of mind, we could pick up bits and scraps of good from almost any minister. As old George Herbert says, ‘The worst speak something good : if all want sense,’—you know what follows.

L. No, I forget.

M. ‘God takes a text, and preaches patience.’

COLLOQUY THE THIRD.

*THE CURATE AND HIS CANDID FRIEND.**SCENE : A Curate's Cottage.*

C. It's a shame! It's a scandal! It's a disgrace! Somebody must write to 'The Guardian,' or had it better be to 'The Times'? The dear old Church of England is fast going to pieces. It is being shaken to its centre by the abuses attending the bestowal of patronage. For the future I shall advise all the young men I come across on no account to go into holy orders. It is the only profession left where promotion goes entirely by favour. Merit is overlooked. Hard work does not tell. Experience is utterly useless. Birth, luck, relationship, accident, a hundred matters which ought to have no influence at all, carry all before them.

C. F. My dear fellow, you are flurried. Pray put down that ruler, for it really looks as though you were going to attack me with it. For the shortcomings of the Church of England I at least am not responsible. Tell me as calmly as you can what has happened.

C. The bishop has just given the living for which I put in an application a few weeks back, and for which I was most strongly recommended, to a young cub who has only been nine months in the diocese, and only five years in orders altogether! Now I have toiled for fourteen years in the same place. I feel I have done my duty. My rector, though he would be sorry to part with me, sent the bishop a first-rate testimonial in my favour, and said it was high time I got preferment. Yet I am left out in the cold, and an inexperienced man is pitched into that place, just because he is nephew to one of the archdeacons!

C. F. I don't wonder you are annoyed.

C. Annoyed is no word for it: I am

disgusted beyond expression. That young whipper-snapper is unmarried. I have, as you know, a wife and five young children dependent upon me. How are we to live decently and respectably on a hundred and fifty a year? Of course I am in debt. There seems to be no hope of disentangling myself. All the nephews and grandsons of all the archdeacons, including those now in their cradles, will clearly be promoted before me. The terrible injustice of the thing is patent.

C. F. I am very sorry for you.

C. Some people would say I ought not to have got married. I got married in the confident expectation that before a family came, or at all events much of a family, the Church of England would provide bread and cheese for me and mine by putting me into some small incumbency. Heaven knows I never looked for a large one! Three hundred a year, the value of that just given away, would have quite satisfied me. There is a moderate

sized house, too, and all things just as I should have wished.

C. F. I can hardly tell you how much I sympathise with you in your disappointment. As I think you have no private means, seven mouths to feed, with endless concomitant expenses, must present difficulties indeed. Beyond all question your ministerial labours are most inadequately requited. And yet—as regards that living, I wonder if I may take the most unpleasant and generally thankless part of a candid friend.

C. What do you mean?

C. F. I happen to know the motives which have induced the bishop to make that presentation. The circumstances of the parish are somewhat special. It has been a great deal neglected. Such religious feeling as there is seems to be enlisted on the side of dissent. The bishop was anxious to send a man of rather exceptional qualifications, and considered almost first and foremost that he must be a good preacher.

C. I am afraid I must allow that preaching is not one of my strong points.

C. F. No. The bishop was greatly prepossessed in your favour, till he sent down one of his chaplains to report upon your efficiency or non-efficiency in the pulpit.

C. Was that the man who sat, the Sunday before last, in the churchwarden's seat? So he was a spy! I thought he looked a sneaking sort of a character.

C. F. Not a bit of it. He is a thorough gentleman, and one of the most good-natured persons in the world. I cannot possibly imagine him a harsh critic. But he had to tell the bishop that it really would *not* do.

C. He did, did he? Then I consider it a most disreputable and underhand proceeding! At the very least he ought to have given me notice. Naturally, I should have taken more pains than usual.

C. F. But you see the bishop wanted to find out what kind of a preacher you are, not when you take more pains than usual, but

when you preach an ordinary sermon on an ordinary occasion. I don't think I can honestly blame either the bishop or his chaplain. The church of the parish in question will hold five hundred people, but I am told that the average congregation is at present under fifty. Now it is very true that the man to whom the living is offered has only been a short time in the diocese, and not very long in holy orders. He is, however, an exceptionally good preacher. I once heard him myself, and he absolutely riveted the attention of his audience. He is sure to fill the church in a few weeks, and from all I hear of him will keep it full.

C. But preaching is not everything. St. Paul calls it foolishness. The services and sacraments—

C. F. St. Paul calls preaching foolishness, but says that it nevertheless pleases God to save by it. No, it is certainly not everything, and from some points of view I am quite ready to place services and sacraments before

it. But it is much for all that, and very much indeed in such a place as we are talking of. How are people to be taught to value services and sacraments?

C. The bishop should have allowed my wife and children to turn the scale in my favour.

C. F. I think not. Please don't knock me down. I consider the bishop should try to find the best man for the post, and should do so quite irrespectively of private and personal wants. No doubt he would have been delighted to meet your wishes, had they chimed in with his sense of duty. I don't suppose the vicar-elect being the nephew of an archdeacon influenced him in the least.

C. Am I then such a bad preacher? I would have tried to fill the church by a hearty service. I would have visited the people from house to house. I would have established guilds, bible-classes, and mother's

meetings. Surely you make too much of mere sermons!

C. F. You are a dear, good fellow, whom everybody likes, and to whom everybody wishes well. I am quite sure you would have entered upon your duties with the full intention of discharging them conscientiously. But the plain fact is, there is one branch of your profession, and a most important one, which you have never learnt. In poor parishes, not to say all parishes, people do like preaching they can understand and appreciate. Unless they get it, many of them won't come to church, however good a service may be, and however efficient a clergyman may prove in other directions. Now you fix your eyes upon your manuscript, and never lift them. You read it in a sort of disconsolate monotone. Every now and then you are sadly indistinct. Where you get your matter from I don't know, but it is—well, all I can say is, it is in admirable accordance with your

manner. There, I have forfeited your friendship for ever!

C. I must say you have discharged the part of a candid friend rather unscrupulously, not to say unfeelingly. You talked of sympathising with me, but if this is sympathy— At the same time I am aware that— Excuse me a moment. There's the postman coming up to the door.

C. F. Don't let me be in the way.

C. (*after opening and reading a letter*). Dear me! How very unexpected! It's uncommonly kind of him! Here's the bishop offering me a vacant living on the other side of the diocese! The population is small, but the income is rather better than the one I applied for. He mentions that there is a comfortable house. The squire is the member of parliament for the division, and is an excellent and liberal-minded man. I'm not dreaming, am I? It's quite upset me. I must run off, and tell my wife.

C. F. This is capital. Let me be the

first to shake you by the hand. Then 'The Guardian' need not be written to, nor yet 'The Times'?

C. No! And I will try hard to improve my preaching.

COLLOQUY THE FOURTH.

*THE OLD LADY AND HER MAID.*SCENE : *The Parlour of a small House.**O. L.* Martha!*M.* Yes, mum.

O. L. Sit down, Martha. Put that hearth-brush aside. This is your first Sunday with me, and therefore you have not yet got to know my manners and customs. Unfortunately my maid, as a general rule, is unable to attend morning service. It is my plan, therefore, to have her in of an afternoon and to talk to her about the sermon to which I have been privileged to listen.

M. (a little frightened). Yes, mum.

O. L. I am told that the Queen does the same with *her* maids.

M. La! does she now?

O. L. Not, you know, that they are maids like you; but maids of honour, and that. Often and often, Martha, I bless God for sermons. You see I lead a rather lonely life. My eyes are bad, and I can read but little. The Sunday sermon gives me things to think about.

M. But they do say, mum, that the vicar isn't much of a preacher.

O. L. I know where you got that. It's Mrs. Gibbs' Ann. Don't you mind Mrs. Gibbs' Ann. Much she knows about preaching. The vicar suits *me*. He mayn't be fine, but he's thoughtful. Now, Martha, don't twiddle your thumbs, but just hear what I have to say.

M. Yes, mum. Mrs. Gibbs' Ann, she asked me if I thought you was converted. She said she was afraid not.

O. L. Mrs. Gibbs' Ann is a Wesleyan Methodist. She has not had the advantage, poor thing! of the teaching of our Church. If

Mrs. Gibbs' Ann would keep her mistress's house a little cleaner, instead of judging other people, it might be better. But listen. The text this morning was part of the Twenty-ninth Psalm—'The Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.' Now, Martha, most probably you have often heard these words without thinking much about them. So have I, I am sorry to say, but I hope I shall never hear them in that careless way again. There's a deal of meaning in them. Take this prayer-book, and find the place.

M. Please, mum, will you kindly find it for me? I never did understand them there letters at the top of the Psalms. If there was a 2 and a 9 I could manage it, but the X's, and the C's, and the L's is too much for me.

O. L. O dear! O dear! how do you ever manage to find your places in church?

M. I do happen upon the right psalms sometimes, mum, before they're quite finished,

but not very often. Why doesn't they printers put plain figures?

O. L. I'll give you a lesson about those letters one of these days. There is really nothing difficult about them. Now attend. Here's your book with the place found. The Twenty-ninth Psalm describes a thunderstorm.

M. Do it really, mum? I was terribly frightened with that one on Friday. The lightning did make me jump, and the plates and the dishes rattled awful.

O. L. Perhaps you will not be so much alarmed another time. Look at the seventh verse. The writer of the psalm says 'it is the glorious God that maketh the thunder.' It is finely called the 'Voice of the Lord,' and some of the wonderful things it does are specially mentioned. It 'breaketh the cedar-trees.' It 'divideth the flames of fire.' It 'shaketh the wilderness.' It 'maketh the hinds to bring forth young.' It 'discovereth the thick bushes.' But then, Martha, though the rain comes down as fast and furious as it

did last Friday, 'the Lord sitteth above the water-flood, and the Lord remaineth a King for ever.' Always think of that!

M. I will, mum. Of course them terrible flashes can't do nothing whatsoever, unless He tells 'em.

O. L. No, indeed. And then, Martha, the preacher said it almost seems as if the thunder ceases as one reads the psalm, and the storm gradually dies away, and the rain stops, and there comes instead a gentle voice, 'The Lord shall give His people the blessing of peace.'

M. And that, mum, you say was his text. Who'd have thought how it come in at the tail of a storm like?

O. L. I've repeated that verse in church, Martha, and read it to myself too, hundreds of times, and yet never saw till now the beauty of its position. That's the good of sermons. They throw such a light upon God's Word. But the vicar went on to point out that there are storms of the soul as well as storms in the air, and that this sweet

promise extends to them also. And first he tried to make us all see that peace is emphatically what the psalmist calls it—a 'blessing.'

M. I'm sure that's true, mum. When you've had a regular row with another gel, and have almost come to cataclaws, it's so nice and comfortable to make it up.

O. L. It's not quite that, Martha, and yet when I come to think of it, it's a little bit of that. The sermon reminded us that we want three kinds of peace to make us really happy—peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with those around us. Martha, can we safely do without peace with God?

M. I suppose not; mum. He must be a terrible one to have for an enemy. Teacher at Sunday-school once talked to us about that, and she did make us shiver. If He was to whirl His lightning at us, where should us be?

O. L. Is it pleasant not to be at peace with ourselves?

M. It's just horrid. When I've done a really wrong thing, I'm that miserable I don't

know which way to turn. I'd a deal sooner have the toothache.

O. L. And you've already said something about the comfort of peace with others, though I didn't like that word 'cataclaws.' Now peace in its highest sense, the clergyman observed, must be a gift. It is out of our power to make it for ourselves. It must be 'given' us. And who must be the giver? Who but the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the Lord Himself? Other sorts of peace must be more or less false, but the Lord's peace must be true and real. 'The Lord shall give.' Now, Martha, you are gaping.

M. O no, mum, I——

O. L. You may not know it, but you are. I saw your apron go up to your mouth. Well, I've nearly done, for of course I can't tell you all that the vicar said. But to whom is this blessing of peace to be given? Look at the psalm. 'The Lord shall give——'

M. (*after a little hesitation, and consulting her Prayer-book*). 'His people.'

O. L. Yes, His people, and the preacher was very plain in explaining who they are. We are all of us His people by creation, but that is not enough. Those of us who have been baptized are His people by adoption, but that is not enough either. To become entitled to this promise we must be His people by faith, by love, and by obedience. I don't quite know what Mrs. Gibbs' Ann means by conversion, but it is plain that there must be a great change in some of us before we can be His people in that sense. Yet it is then, and then only, that we can get the peace, and it will be a peace that 'passeth all understanding.' Now, Martha, your attention is gone again. Indeed it is, for I saw you watching the cat. Well, another Sunday afternoon you must be prepared for a rather longer account of the sermon ; for it is as good for me to give it as it is, or ought to be, for you to hearken. Always listen to sermons, Martha ; not only to my poor remembrance of them, but still more to sermons as they are

delivered from the pulpit. You will ordinarily go to church on Sunday evenings, the while I keep house, and read the psalms and lessons, or as much of them as my eyes will let me, by myself. By the time you are a middle-aged woman you will be ten times as wise, ten times as intelligent, and ten times as good, if you have carefully and conscientiously listened to sermons. What they have been and are to me I cannot explain to you. By-the-bye, do you think you could bring me home some account, however short, of what our good vicar says to-night?

M. (embarrassed). I'm afraid not, mum. I'm very sorry, I'm sure, but—but—you see it wasn't considered in the wages.

COLLOQUY THE FIFTH.

THE CONCLAVE AT THE CLUB.

SCENE: *The Reading-room in a London Club ;
a group round the fireplace.*

A. (*laying down a newspaper*). I always observe that at this time of year the daily journals have a flight of letters about sermons.

B. Yes, they generally come at the same period as the great sea-serpent and the big gooseberry. Many people, you know, call it the silly season.

A. Here and there we find a remark worth reading ; but on the whole the correspondence is about as dull and unpractical as the sermons it criticises.

B. And that is saying a good deal. I rarely go to church myself, because I happen

to hold advanced opinions, and doubt the style of thing altogether. Still, I should go oftener if the parsons preached better. It would not be a bad way of spending a spare hour or so on a Sunday, provided only you could secure a fair standard of merit and culture in the pulpit. My mind is an open one. I can admire oratory and practical advice, even when my judgment rejects dogma.

A. I often think that the pulpit might be made a most powerful organ of public utility, if the parsons would but forget all they have ever learnt, and start upon an entirely new tack.

C. Hear! hear! Now my notion is that sermons should always be on topics of the day. We are not living in the time of the patriarchs, not yet of the prophets; no, nor even of the early Christians. We are living in this reckless, rushing, helter-skelter nineteenth century, and our parsons should select their subjects accordingly. If they caught up the events of the past week, and gave them a

sort of moral or religious turn, they would scarcely have the listless audiences that confront them now.

A. Don't you think that we have enough of the topics of the day in the newspapers? If people want the moral and religious turn you speak of, surely there is abundance of publications—'Guardians,' 'Records,' 'Banners,' and so forth—which specially go in for giving it, not to mention the occasional preaching fits of 'The Times' and the 'Daily Telegraph.' To commence a sermon—'A man was hanged yesterday at Norwich,' or 'Have you read the last new novel by Rider Haggard?' or 'That terrible collision at Mugby Junction which has just shocked the public,'—might perhaps secure a few moments' attention, but would scarcely uphold the dignity of the pulpit. No, my notion is somewhat different. Why should not the clergy use their great opportunities to popularise science? Science, in all its various departments and developments, intimately connected as it is with bodily

longevity and with intellectual refinement, is, as it seems to me, at once the great fact and the great necessity of the age. Unfortunately people don't think so. Lectures on science are sparsely attended ; newspaper and magazine articles on science are rarely read. Politics, sport, fiction, fashion hold their own in the public estimation, to the discouragement, if not the absolute neglect, of the marvellous triumphs of research, and the countless advantages, both social and otherwise, which ought to attend upon it. Now, if the clergy would only throw themselves into a movement to popularise science, instead of floundering in the traditions of the past, what an immense benefit they would confer upon the community at large ! Of course I should not recommend any unnecessary interference with existing prejudices. The wonderful affection of the English people for the Bible should be dealt with with the utmost tenderness. By all means let the clergy continue to take their texts from that venerable volume,

for which I have really great respect, and extract from it the various beauties it undoubtedly contains. But this teaching should be dominated by the recollection that old theories have been in no slight measure superseded by modern investigation, and that true wisdom consists in submitting to the inevitable. I could draw out for our vicar, as I have told him, an admirable syllabus of scientific and philosophic instruction which would last him for a year. I am sorry to say, however, though an intelligent man, he seemed not to chime in with my friendly suggestion.

B. It may or may not be expedient for our preachers to occupy themselves with topics of the day, or with questions connected with science. It appears to me, however, that there is an antecedent matter with which they are bound to deal, and unless they treat it satisfactorily, they cannot expect to be listened to with deference or respect upon any subject whatever. They have to justify

their position as teachers of Christianity. Is Christianity true? Most of us have assumed its truth from our childhood upwards ; but the close scrutiny brought to bear upon it of recent years has left many of us in a state of doubt, not to say of positive unbelief. If the parsons can defend it, let them do it. If they can answer the apparently overwhelming arguments against the authenticity and credibility of many of the books of the Bible, let them answer them. We are ready to listen with all the predisposition to be convinced which comes from our educational and traditional sympathies. But is there not a preposterous unreality in their quietly taking for granted what the reason and intellect of so many of their audience deny? And if Christianity is to be saved, must it not be saved by its champions grappling fairly and manfully with what is being said in its disparagement on every side, instead of walking in a fool's paradise, and supposing, or pre-

tending to suppose, that popular belief is as it used to be ?

D. I only partly agree with you. While fully allowing that it is a great mistake in the clergy to cling with such pertinacity to statements of fact and doctrine upon which so much doubt has been thrown, I cannot think that polemical discussion is advisable at our Sunday services. Of course polemical discussion somewhere and under some conditions is unavoidable ; but in view of the mixed character of our congregations, including young and old, learned and ignorant, should it not be confined to the four walls of the lecture-hall and the pages of the public press ? Those who wish to hear what can be said for and against the credibility of revelation have not the slightest difficulty in getting their craving satisfied in other directions. At church, however, there is common ground upon which old-fashioned believers and modern enquirers can equally take their stand. Let the clergy preach morality. Let them

inculcate honesty, thrift, purity, truthfulness, industry, temperance, liberality, the government of the passions, all the good qualities in the enforcement of which the various religious systems are absolutely agreed. Whatever may be thought of the claims of the Bible to be considered inspired, it cannot be denied that both its narratives and its didactic parts are admirably suggestive to a preacher desirous of declaiming against vice and extolling virtue.

E. I will venture to hope that there is room for a yet further opinion. You who know me are aware that I lay claim to no exceptional amount of learning or ability. I fancy I may look upon myself as an average Englishman, with a wife and family to support by my exertions, and but little time at my disposal for matters extraneous to my profession. Well, I go to church on a Sunday, and what do I want? Not certainly a hash of the last week's newspapers. It is an immense relief to have one day in seven free from the

hostle of politics, ay, and from most of the other topics of the press. Not, again, to receive homœopathic doses of science. I am ready to take off my hat to science in its right place, but at church I want what it cannot give me, and what I should certainly feel defrauded to be deprived of. Not to hear apologies for Christianity. They may be very necessary in some quarters, but surely an ordinary service on an ordinary Sunday is scarcely the time for them. My wife and children are generally by my side. They are not troubled with doubts about Christianity, and God forbid they ever should be ! Why should the parsons suggest difficulties to minds which have never suspected them ? The doubters are for the most part away, and those who are there are quite prepared to assume the truth and authority of revelation. For myself, I took some pains a few years ago to look into those sceptical objections to which reference has been made, and came to the conclusion that they won't hold water. To

me the school of thought with which they are connected is not 'advanced' at all, but in all that makes life worth living distinctly and emphatically retrograde. It is a falling back upon the old heathen philosophy, under which the world so long groaned and travailed in pain. Nor, once more, would my want be met by mere moral essays, in the absence of any motive power capable of giving them vitality. They might make me feel ashamed of the past, and apprehensive of the future, but that is about all they would do for me.

C. Then what is it you look for in sermons? Surely not a mere reflex of the lessons of our childhood. We are men, not children. We know nineteen-twentieths of what the parson is going to say before he opens his lips, and the other twentieth is rarely worth hearkening to.

E. I am glad, my friend, that you are so well up in your Bible as to need neither teaching nor reminding. With me it is otherwise.

I am ignorant of much, and I am afraid I forget more. As I advance in life, the conviction grows upon me that the daily routine of existence, with its anxieties and contradictions, would scarcely be supportable, apart from that system of belief in which I have been brought up, and which, though you more than hint it is superannuated, I see not the slightest reason to discard. As far as I am concerned, it is a case of

‘Tell me the old, old story,’

for the new ones don’t meet my requirements in the least.

B. But is not the old, old story slightly monotonous?

E. In one sense it is, but in that sense I like monotony. I should feel indignant and disgusted if a fresh gospel were to be sprung upon me. But in another sense there need be no monotony in sermons. Is not the Bible like a magnificent kaleidoscope, which only needs a gentle motion on the part of the

reader to produce endless combinations of exquisite form and beauty ?

C. Then it is a pity the shaking is not better done.

E. In common with most laymen, I wish that many of our parsons preached to us a little differently. Their manner should be more natural, and there should be a wiser adaptation of means to ends. These letters in the papers, foolish as they are, may not improbably do some good. But what I seek at church on Sundays, over and above the sacraments and services, is the development and enforcement of those scriptural truths to which I have been accustomed. Truths I still believe them to be, notwithstanding all the wild talk that is prevalent against them, and I know no calamity that could happen to me equal to being persuaded otherwise. You, my friends, would put me off with a variety of other matters, but I protest against being called upon to exchange my heritage as an English churchman for any

such grotesque substitutes. God forbid that when I ask for bread I should ever be met by the offer of these stones ! What I crave after is to learn to live and to die as a Christian man. I look to preachers specially trained for the purpose, and presumably devoting much time to the study of the sacred scriptures, to do for me what I have but scant opportunities, owing to the incessant pressure of other duties, of doing for myself. I want to gather rules for my daily conduct, or if I know them already, to be guided in their practical application. I want to have my memory refreshed concerning those wonderful Bible narratives, which are unrivalled both for warning and example. I want to hear the true sense of the teaching of prophets and apostles, ay, and of One greater than they. I want to have fresh light thrown upon familiar texts, such as may flash upon me in the midst of worrying days and sleepless nights. You perhaps tell me that I might gain all these advantages by consulting the Bible and

its commentators at home. No doubt with leisure and industry I might, but practically I don't, and even if I did, the living voice of the living preacher would be a material help. In a few years at the outside this club will know me no more. The newspapers and magazines will be on the table just as usual, but I shall not read them. That door will open, but I shall not enter at it. What sort of sermons shall I wish to have listened to then? What kind of instruction shall I desire to have followed?

B. (after a moment's silence). My dear fellow, I had no idea you were like that. I wish—I wish—well, good night!

A. He is gone! I never saw him moved in that way before. Did you observe how his lip quivered? and I am nearly sure I saw a tear in his eye.

D. I did not say anything extraordinary, did I?

A. You have clearly got hold of something which he has not. Perhaps it would be

better if we all—I think I will go upstairs and have a smoke.

D. And I will go with you. I can hardly say how much I respect that outspoken expression of opinion. It takes no courage in these days to be sceptical, but for a man to stand up to the old colours in that way is worth hearing.

C. How odd that we should get talking about sermons in this room ! And how doubly and trebly odd that the conversation should have taken such a serious turn !

COLLOQUY THE SIXTH.

THE CLERICAL MEETING.

SCENE : *The Library of the Rural Dean. A
Gathering of Clergy.*

R. D. I am sure we are all much obliged to Mr. Ravensworth for the thoughtful paper he has read to us on the crucial subject of preaching. In accordance with our usual practice, we will proceed to discuss what he has brought before us.

A. I hope our excellent friend put a little too much black paint in his brush when he drew that melancholy picture of the general state of scriptural and liturgical knowledge among churchmen and churchwomen. Great efforts have been made in recent years to extend and improve instruction upon these

subjects in most of our schools, from the highest to the lowest. Surely these efforts have not been made in vain.

B. No doubt they must have had their effect, and yet I am afraid I must endorse Mr. Ravensworth's view. It has fallen to my lot to hold several important charges both in town and country, and to mingle with all sorts and conditions of men and women. It is, of course, difficult to test the actual state of things ; but my firm belief is that, if you could constrain, I will not say a congregation of rustics, but of the great middle class, or even of the aristocracy, to go through an elementary examination in the most important subjects which can engage the human intellect, the result would be beyond measure startling. I am not speaking lightly when I affirm that few could explain in an intelligent manner why they are Christians, and still fewer why they are Church-people. Of the four Gospels they might manifest some floating and confused knowledge, but most of the books of the Bible

would be found to be, for all rational purposes, as undiscovered tracts of territory as the wilds of Central Africa. The slightest acquaintance with Church history, Church biography, Church literature, or Church ritual, would be discovered to be exceptional. In a word, the schoolmasters and schoolmistresses of the country (I am not blaming them, for the fault may lie elsewhere) have left only too much room for preachers to supplement their efforts.

C. I thought Mr. Ravensworth was here and there a little hard upon his own order. I understood him to say that, if we fail to drive a few definite truths and facts into the heads of our people, the fault must be either in the hammer, by which I suppose he means the sermon, or the man who uses it. He did not mention the third possibility—the heads.

R. It was not my intention to press heavily upon my clerical brethren, still less to deny the immense responsibility of hearers. But I do maintain that there must be ways of getting hold of the ears and faculties of our

congregations, if we could only find out what they are.

D. The ridiculous thing is, that along with the profound and widespread ignorance which has been spoken of, and to which I can bear abundant witness, there goes a general conviction that sermons can teach nothing but what is already known, and that therefore they need not be seriously listened to.

R. Then we shall deserve all the more credit if we beat down that conviction by forcing people to hearken to us whether they choose it or not, and making them see that to do so is well worth their while. We stand up in our pulpits, and have our people in front of us. Depend upon it, if they pick up no instruction worth having, the explanation is not exclusively to be met with on one side.

E. I was glad that the paper recognised the duty of impressing the heart and conscience as still more important than teaching or reminding. After all, most people know quite enough to be saved, if only they could be

persuaded to entwine knowledge with practice.

R. And in this persuading, as well as in the art of teaching, many of us are lamentably deficient. Some of our arrows fall short of the mark, others go a good way beyond it, others straggle wildly to the right hand and to the left. The ground in every direction is covered with our shafts, but the target is for the most part untouched.

F. You are determined not to spare us.

R. I am determined not to spare myself, whom I distinctly include in any disparaging remarks that fall from me. We are met together, in the absence of the laity, to try and help one another in the great duties entrusted to us. It is just as well that such misgivings of efficiency as occur to us should be spoken out plainly.

R. D. I observed that when the paper came to speak of the framework and construction of our discourses, it ranged them under three heads, textual, topical, and ex-

pository. By textual sermons I understand those which aim at drawing out the meaning of particular verses ; by topical, those which deal with broad subjects rather than with isolated passages of Scripture—the text, if there be one, being simply a sort of motto ; by expository, those which institute a running commentary upon a whole chapter or a considerable part of it. It is not contended, I suppose, that this classification is altogether exhaustive.

R. Certainly not. Some sermons partake of all three characteristics : others utterly refuse to be relegated to any category whatever, and are simply indescribable. I think, however, you will find that most of the best sermons, ancient and modern, fall into these divisions.

A. Which of the three is to be considered most useful ?

R. I should be sorry to put one above another. Each in turn has its advantages, and accordingly each in turn should be adopted by the painstaking preacher. Monotony is

avoided by his not allowing his personal predilections in the matter to run away with him.

F. Mr. Ravensworth dropt down without the slightest mercy upon sermons destitute of any clear and definite plan. I know the common fault to which he refers. It has become the fashion of late years to ridicule the old custom of dividing sermons into distinctive heads. The result has been in many instances unfortunate. A great deal of modern preaching is painfully discursive. There is an utter absence of method in its arrangement, and as a consequence it leaves no sort of impression behind it.

D. Don't you think that it is a sort of reaction from the old 'firstly,' 'secondly,' 'thirdly,' and 'to conclude'?

F. Probably. The skeleton of a sermon might, in the days to which you refer, have been too prominent. When a discourse has been clothed in flesh, it is not always necessary or desirable that the bones should be visible. But then the bones should be there. Now

so many modern sermons are apparently without bones.

E. Yes, they might stop short at any moment, or on the other hand go meandering on to an indefinite extent. As somebody said, I do like to have a beginning, and a middle, and an ending.

A. I am unable to agree with the marked preference of the paper for extempore preaching. A good extempore sermon is most enjoyable, and I dare say beneficial: but, oh! how one longs for the presence of a manuscript when compelled to listen to the wishy-washy trash of some would-be popular orators!

R. My preference for extempore preaching, in the common but most inaccurate acceptation of that ill-used epithet, is all the more disinterested because I could never myself attain to it. I must admit the wishy-washy trash over which my friend groans, though I fancy I have occasionally heard the like from manuscript. But my point is, that even a poor sermon which carries along with it the im-

pression of earnestness and reality has a far greater effect upon mixed congregations than a much better one that fails to do so. Now it can scarcely be questioned that, rightly or wrongly, the impression of earnestness and reality goes along with spoken discourses, rather than with those read off from sermon-books.

R. D. Very few of us, however, who have been accustomed up to middle life or beyond it to deliver our sermons from manuscript will ever now alter our practice. There may probably be in the future, as there have been in the past, a few notable exceptions, but it would be vain to expect them to be numerous. I rejoice, therefore, that the paper gave some useful hints to those of us who are tied and bound to our manuscript, and who lack either the courage, or the ability, or perhaps the disposition to break loose. Remembering that we labour under an initiatory disadvantage, we should do our very best to minimise it by taking especial pains with our delivery. More

particularly we should recollect, when writing our sermons, that we are not writing them to be printed, or read by people in their own homes, but to be preached to them in church. Mr. Ravensworth remarked, and I think he is perfectly right, that the style of composition most desirable for these different purposes is by no means identical.

E. What should be the length of sermons?

R. It is impossible, I think, to lay down any hard and fast rule, where so much depends upon the place, the congregation, the subject, and the man. Some sermons of fifteen minutes sound dreadfully long, whereas others of fifty seem only too short. We must recognise the undoubted fact that the people of this generation are far more restive under long sermons than their predecessors. The most common length for ordinary occasions seems to have settled down into twenty minutes, and perhaps that, on an average, is free from objection.

F. Better too short than too long. Even popular preachers sometimes destroy the excellent effect produced by the first half of their discourse by the unnecessary extension, often amounting to tiresome repetition, of the latter part.

B. And yet too short is a bad fault, and one to which some of us are tempted by idleness, by the supposed unwillingness of our people to listen to us, and by the growing elaboration of modern services. In certain churches with which I am acquainted the sermon is gradually being whittled down, till one wonders how much of it will ultimately be left.

E. On the question of delivery, does Mr. Ravensworth approve of clergy taking lessons from professed elocutionists?

R. I think professed elocutionists have done good in some instances by giving hints concerning the management of the voice, and by removing awkward tricks of tone and gesture. After all, it must be remembered

that the effective delivery of a speech or sermon in a large building is an art, and has to be learnt like other arts. At the same time I confess to a dread of artificiality. As a general rule, I feel certain that the combination of observation and practice is all that is wanted.

B. I am afraid that some of us have got the artificiality already, though not in the way of oratorical demonstrativeness.

G. How far is the use of anecdotes expedient? The paper did not touch upon that. It is certainly a practice very much on the increase.

R. The careful and limited use of anecdotes seems to me to be admirable, especially in poor congregations. When they are really good, and when they fit deftly into their places, few methods of illustration can be more useful. But they should not be lugged in by the head and shoulders, and I think—yes, I do think, that they should be genuine. I am induced to say that, because a friend

of mine considers himself justified in making them up. He looks upon them in the light of fables or parables, and considers their truthfulness a matter of no moment.

R. D. Mr. Ravensworth's enumeration of the qualifications desirable in a preacher is simply overwhelming. I am not prepared to strike any of them out, but the question 'Who is sufficient for these things?' occurred to me with tremendous force. I think he mentioned a strictly consistent and conscientious life, a real love of souls, a constant habit of intercessory prayer, an accurate acquaintance with the Word of God, a knowledge of ancient and modern writers, a close observation of men's characters and dispositions, a clear voice, a persuasive manner, great presence of mind, and the sort of chastened judgment which may enable him not only to proclaim, but rightly to divide the Word of Truth.

R. I well know the improbability, almost the impossibility, of such qualifications meet-

ing in one man ; but if you want to shoot high—you know the proverb.

H. I think you are all gone mad about preaching. You vastly overrate its importance and possible influence. A ten minutes' composition with no heresy in it, and a few nice quotations from the Fathers, surely satisfies every reasonable requirement. There is much more teaching in sacraments, in ritual, and even in hymn-singing than in sermons. I almost wish the custom of pre-Reformation times could be adopted again ; no sermon, as a general rule, but now and then a preaching friar coming round as a treat.

R. D. You will not increase the popular estimate of sacraments, ritual, or hymn-singing, no, nor yet their bearing upon the spiritual life, by depreciating sermons. All God's ordinances must stand together. Each of them is beautiful in its time. Sacraments can no more take the place of sermons than sermons can usurp the office of sacraments. But there is one serious consideration which

occurs to me. It becomes us to remember that, while the unworthiness of ministers cannot hinder the grace of sacraments, the unworthiness of preachers, ay, and the inefficiency of preachers, can and do hinder the effect of sermons. I hope that Mr. Ravensworth's valuable paper, and the short discussion we have had upon it, may set us all enquiring whether there is not an indescribable something, call it unction or what you please, that is wanting in our preaching. Let every man entertain the question, not in reference to his neighbours, but to himself.

COLLOQUY THE SEVENTH.

*THE YOUNG LADIES.*SCENE : *A London Boudoir.*

Alice. O mother, we have had such a beautiful sermon!

Eva. Lovely!

Kate. Most eloquent!

Mother. I am the more sorry that this swollen face has kept me away from church. Who was the preacher?

Alice. A stranger. The vergers could not tell us his name.

Eva. But a most striking-looking man.

Kate. And his voice was heavenly.

Alice. And we shall never forget what he said.

Mother. What was his text?

Eva. His text! Let me see. Alice, where was his text?

Alice. I—I think it was from St. Luke.

Kate. O Alice! how can you say so? Why, it was from Deuteronomy.

Alice. That I am sure it was not. Why, he kept talking of the Evangelist.

Mother. Perhaps, my dears, if you told me the words, I should know the place.

Alice. I never could remember words.

Eva. Nor I.

Kate. They don't think anything of mere verbal repetition at the High School.

Mother. But I should like to glean some information of this very beautiful sermon. What was it about?

Alice. (*after a pause*). Well, mother, it was about—it was about—religion!

Mother. I presume so, but that is rather a wide subject, and capable of very varied treatment. What particular branch of it did he take up?

Eva. O mother! his action was so graceful

—not too violent, you know, but just sufficient to enforce attention.

Mother. And as it was sufficient to enforce attention, I am waiting to hear a few particulars of what he said.

Alice. There were some striking anecdotes.

Kate. Yes, that one about the bear, for instance. A Laplander was once pursuing a bear——

Eva. Now, Kate! the bear was pursuing *him*!

Kate. Well, it was one way or the other; and the Laplander had a Bible in his breast-pocket which his mother had given him.

Eva. No, his grandmother.

Alice. It was not a Laplander at all. You are confusing it with another anecdote. It was a young English sailor.

Kate. Well, Laplander, or English sailor, or whatever he was, he was just close to the bear, when——

Eva. You are missing out the best part of

the story. Before he started, his grandmother had said to him——

Kate. Ah, yes; but, if you remember, he had first said to his grandmother——

Eva. You are quite wrong.

Kate. Do let me go on. At all events, he and his grandmother had been talking together——

Alice. You forget, Kate, that the grandmother was deaf and dumb. That was the touching part of the story. So she pointed to the Bible——

Kate. Nonsense, Alice. I am sure the grandmother——

Mother. I am afraid, dears, you will not make much of that anecdote. But let me know the main drift and design of the sermon.

Eva. Mother, dear, you are a little tiresome. You cannot expect us to repeat the sermon right off. It gave us a great deal of most excellent advice.

Mother. In reference to——what?

Eva. Oh, our conduct. I never heard one

more calculated to do good. The illustrations were especially clever.

Mother. As for instance?

Eva. It would be impossible to do them justice. You see if you separate them from the context——

Mother. Well, then, we will drop the illustrations. I will be satisfied with the heads of the discourse.

Alice. I don't think it had any heads.

Kate. How can you say so? I am sure he spoke of coming to the last head, though I forget what it was.

Eva. We met the Tidfits coming out of church, and they heartily agreed with us in our admiration of the sermon.

Mother. I am quite prepared to accept your estimate of the preacher, as well as that of the Tidfits. But in proportion as he was exceptionally good, is it not extraordinary that I can gain no intelligent information concerning his utterances? You forget the text. You are in a hopeless mist as to his main

subject. You break down over his leading anecdote. You cannot recall his illustrations. If his discourse had distinctive heads, as to which your testimony is divided, I am unable to get at them. Yet you are not little girls. Two of you are supposed to have finished your education, and the third is in the sixth form of a high school.

Alice. Please don't scold us, mother dear! I am afraid your toothache is not quite gone.

Mother. Just at present the toothache is less annoying than the discovery how little my daughters really listen to the instruction given them in church.

Alice. But is it not possible for a sermon to have done us ever so much good, and yet not to be of the sort to be repeated?

Mother. It may have given you some pleasurable sensations, but I doubt the good, if the mind within an hour is afterwards in a state of utter obliviousness as to its purpose and object. The sweet tone of a preacher's voice, his appearance, his action, his fluency, may all

have a certain delightful effect ; his words, too, even if they go in at one ear and out at the other, may be like strains of ravishing music. But of how little consequence all that really is ! ‘ A sower went out to sow his seed.’ I am sadly afraid that in your case the seed did not even get as far as the rock, or the thorns, but was absolutely lost by the wayside.

Kate. You are very hard upon us. If we had known you were going to question us about the sermon, we would have listened in that special way we are obliged to do to lectures at school.

Mother. Surely that habit in which you are being trained should be transferred elsewhere. Do think what sermons are for ; not to occupy twenty minutes or half an hour of a Sunday morning, not even to interest, but to send us away, if possible, wiser and better than we were. The accident of my absence from church, and my happening to ask you what the preacher said, has revealed a state of things not by any means gratifying to me,

and still less agreeable, I hope and trust, to you, but one which it is well should be discovered, in order that it may be altered. Sermons are plainly thrown away upon you. If even a preacher avowed by you all to have been exceptionally eloquent has left so indistinct an impression on your minds, I hardly like to think what the case is on more ordinary occasions. Yet you are missing more than you know of.

Alice. But common sermons don't sound as if they were meant to be listened to.

Mother. It would seem that even uncommon ones fail to battle against the carelessness of the audience. It is a great treat to hear a really good preacher ; but if we look upon preaching as an ordinance of God, and submit ourselves to it with teachableness and humility, we shall rarely, if ever, be sent empty away. At all events, it is quite nonsense to suppose that the sermons you young people hear Sunday after Sunday do not contain much of which you are absolutely ignorant, and much also of

which you need constantly to be reminded. Pray cure yourselves of that chronic state of dreaminess, before which even the preacher of this morning, with all his eloquence, appears to have been powerless.

Eva. But it really was a very beautiful sermon.

COLLOQUY THE EIGHTH.

THE CHURCHMAN AND THE SALVATIONIST.

SCENE : *A casual meeting between a Church Layman and an Officer of the Salvation Army with whom he chances to be slightly acquainted.*

O. S. A. Well, sir, how many conversions have you had lately at your church ?

C. L. Conversions !

O. S. A. Yes, conversions. You know that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his ways saves a soul from death and hides a multitude of sins. We had eleven grown-up people upon the penitent bench last Sunday, besides several children. During the few months we have been in the town, several hundreds have found salvation through our poor ministrations. I suppose your vicar

has practically the same ends in view as we have, however we may differ in means. He, too, would turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. No doubt he has received an education to which we can lay no claim. Perhaps he has been still more successful.

C. L. I don't think he believes in conversions, in your sense of the word.

O. S. A. No ! If I had the privilege of being acquainted with him, I think I should make bold to say, 'Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things ?'

C. L. We don't like your drum, and your brass band, and all the other rowdy proceedings by which you disturb the quiet of our Sundays, and make the town absolutely hideous.

O. S. A. Ah ! sir, you would indulge in your Sunday quiet, the while drunkards perish in their wickedness, and blasphemers go to their own place. But let that pass. I was speaking of your vicar. Surely he believes

that there are vast numbers in this place who are not at peace with God ?

C. L. Yes, I suppose he believes that.

O. S. A. And that to bring even one of them into a state of acceptance with Him is a great and glorious work, causing joy, not merely upon earth, but among the angels.

C. L. Most certainly.

O. S. A. And that to him, your vicar, has been committed the ministry of reconciliation, that is, the ministry one of the leading objects of which is to reconcile the sinner to his God.

C. L. Beyond all question. You see our vicar has been properly ordained ; but we don't believe that you——

O. S. A. O sir ! put me aside altogether. I'll say a word about myself and my colleagues by-and-bye. But your vicar ; has he been blest with many cases of—I won't use the term conversion, if you don't like it, but many cases of men and women brought to see for the first time the real value of their

souls, and made altogether to change their manner of life ?

C. L. I really don't know. The church does things quietly. There is no rattle of the big drum with us.

O. S. A. But if the Church does these things at all—things, I mean, of the sort I have referred to—they must needs be more or less known. 'A city which is set on a hill cannot be hid.' Drunkards cannot be made sober, blasphemers cannot be made reverent, profligates cannot be made moral, people who have never been in the habit of attending public worship cannot make their appearance in the house of God Sunday after Sunday, without attracting the observation of their neighbours. O no, sir, men and women are not invisible, neither are their actions invisible. Perhaps if I were to apply to your verger, as I think you call him, he could furnish me with a list of such instances, of which I could make use, when recounting the triumphs of Christ over sin and wicked-

ness in this place, during the last six months.

C. L. I can undertake to say he has no such list. We don't pretend to keep anything of the sort.

O. S. A. Indeed ! Can that mean that conversions—I beg your pardon, thorough reformations of life and conduct—call them what you please, are unknown at your church ? Do your clergy never make a man lay aside his evil practices, and become in all respects a changed character ?

C. L. I hope so, I do hope so.

O. S. A. May I ask whether you have lived long in the town ?

C. L. I was born and brought up in it.

O. S. A. And in looking back, have you known many instances in which the preaching of the clergy has had the effects I have spoken of ?

C. L. Why, no ; I can't say that of my own personal knowledge I can recall many such cases.

O. S. A. Can you recall one ?

C. L. You press me closely. To speak candidly, I am unable at this moment to do so, though that is not saying they have been non-existent. Our vicar is a most excellent man. His curates are most excellent men. The congregations are good. The number of communicants is large. What is generally called church work flourishes among us. But great changes in the kind of people you describe are surely rare.

O. S. A. Not with us. It is barely six months since we entered the town, and no single week has elapsed without numerous conversions. You object that we are not ordained. I say nothing about ordination, but I assert the right of every Christian man to bring sinners to God, if he can. You object to our drum and our brass band. I am not sure that, as a matter of private taste, I like them myself ; but they enable us to get hold of a class we should not otherwise touch. Come to our poor place next Sunday night,

and you will probably find a bench-full of notorious evil-doers, trembling and astonished like Saul of Tarsus, and asking, ' Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? '

C. L. All emotion, sir, all emotion.

O. S. A. But surely good emotion, genuine emotion, emotion calculated to lead them to Christ. Is then emotion in spiritual matters wrong? Was old Ezra wrong, when he stood up in that pulpit of wood, and made the multitude before the watergate weep as one man because they had not kept the law of Moses? Depend upon it, sir, the world would be the better for more of such emotion. The people of whom I speak, some of them the scum of the town, will profess themselves determined to abandon their bad ways. They will be led to kneel down and ask pardon of the blessed Jesus; and when you see the joy that lights up their faces, I think you will scarcely doubt they have found it. They will next be taught to ask for the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to enable them to keep their new resolu-

tions. All this they will do with the certainty of being laughed at, ay, often positively persecuted, by their old friends and companions. You will maintain that the next morning will find them just as they were. Now that is the crucial point. If they are just as they were, I grant you there has been no conversion. Experience shows, however, that while some ten per cent., it may be twenty per cent., are just as they were, the large majority are henceforth changed creatures. They leave off their vicious habits. Their old haunts and associates are abandoned. Many of the signs and tokens of grace may be discerned in them, notably a love for the ordinances of religion, though I don't say quite of your sort. Their very appearance becomes altered. Looks of low cunning, of intemperance, of profligacy, give place to a peaceful expression of countenance, which must be seen to be understood. They walk to and fro in the world as those who have found a pearl of great price, with which no consideration will induce them to part. O sir, the

spire of your church points upwards to the sky. It is a magnificent building. It has, I am told, a carefully trained choir. I am quite willing to assume that the clergy are all you describe them to be. But, instead of being down upon us, both publicly and privately, as I am told they are, let them go and do the like with their enchantments. At all events, when they see us casting out devils in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, let them have the sympathy and the charity to say, though we follow not with them, 'Forbid them not, for they that are not against us are on our part.'

C. L. We have our Church Missions.

O. S. A. Yes, but I don't think much of your Church Missions. They mean well, but they are not pungent enough, not incisive enough, the weapons not sufficiently fitted for the battle, the means too delicate and refined to bring about the wished-for ends.

C. L. And we have our Church Army, though I am not myself acquainted with its working.

O. S. A. A palpable imitation of ours, but with much of the nerve taken out of it.

C. L. I should like to make some enquiries about those converts of yours.

O. S. A. By all means. Here is a list of names and addresses. You will meet with occasional backsliders, but I will venture to say they are outnumbered by those who stand to their colours. Good evening, sir, unless you will accompany me to a knee drill.

C. L. What in the world is that?

O. S. A. A sight you seldom see, I believe, in church. Your people loll, lounge, sprawl, touch the hassocks with the tips of their knees, do anything in short but really kneel down. There is no mistake about what our people do. Will you come?

C. L. O, no, no! Good night.

[*They part company.*]

C. L. (*to himself*). That is a strange fellow. Could he have seen the way I kneel in church, I wonder? And then to think of his addressing our good vicar, even in

imagination, in that style! I don't believe in his conversions. If I have time to look into them, I have little doubt that I shall find nine-tenths of them shams. And yet I rather like the man. I do think he is in earnest. And if it is true that he gets notorious bad characters to sit upon his penitent bench, and all that, why, it is in itself a remarkable fact, showing in the very least that these poor creatures have a longing after a better life. I didn't half relish what he said about our clergy doing the like with their enchantments. It seemed comparing himself to Aaron, and our parsons to the false magicians of Egypt, whereas surely it is the other way about. And yet when I come to think of it, I am afraid there is a certain amount of truth in his insinuations. Our clergy keep the good straight, and it is to be hoped make them better ; but it is astonishing how seldom they get hold of the bad. Even at a Mission, there seems a general raising of the standard of well-doing on the part of a settled con-

gregation rather than the gathering in of outsiders. Theoretically of course the Church ought to be making constant inroads against the world, the flesh, and the devil. I wish such inroads were more marked. When I observed that we did things quietly, and without the aid of the big drum, I thought I had that chap, but I must confess he tripped me up. I fear that somehow or other we have not discovered the right way of dealing with that vast body of people who don't come to church, or attend any place of worship whatever, but just drift on in forgetfulness, if not denial, of their immortality. There must be a screw loose somewhere.

COLLOQUY THE NINTH.

THE TWO STICKS.

SCENE : *The Garden of a London Square.*

A. Ah! Brown, so you have turned in for your usual constitutional. Did you go to hear Canon Vevasour at St. Helen's on Friday?

B. Indeed, I did.

A. What did you think of him?

B. I scarcely thought so much of him as of myself.

A. In what way?

B. I came to the melancholy conclusion that, as a preacher, I am—a stick.

A. A stick! It might be ungentlemanly to contradict you, but please explain.

B. That was preaching. Have I ever

preached ? The question forced itself upon me with most unpleasant pertinacity. No doubt I have publicly read sermons, whereby I have sent a vast number of people to sleep, and have banished many more into the region of far-away thought ; but have I ever done anything that was worthy of being called preaching ? The Canon was in touch with his audience from start to finish. I feel I have never got into touch with mine.

A. Dear me ! You must have taken a fit of the blues. Of course you and I cannot expect to preach like Canon Vevasour. He is one of the first preachers of the country.

B. Yes, but all the same, what I saw and heard has set me thinking : what I saw of the congregation, quite as much as what I heard of the Canon. It never before occurred to me what sermons might be made.

A. I heard the Canon, too, and was pleased with him, though perhaps scarcely so much as I had expected. It was good, but there was very little eloquence or originality

about it. He hesitated, too, rather painfully at times.

B. That's just it. If the sermon had been letter A, No. 1, it would scarcely have given me these disagreeable sensations. I should have said, 'Well, it is out of the question that I should ever come within a hundred miles of that.' But, as you observe, it really was nothing astonishing. There was hardly a thought in it that soared above the commonplace. The utterance of the Canon, though generally fluent, was every now and then momentarily at fault. Yet there was a reality about the whole proceeding which struck me as being in strong contrast to those perfunctory performances which both clergy and laity believe to be essential, but in which neither seem to have much faith or interest. Not a word appeared to fall to the ground between pulpit and benches. The Canon clearly intended to teach, and the people as clearly were almost compelled to be taught.

A. You see he had his reputation to help

him, and I cannot but think it must have been made by better sermons than we heard on Friday.

B. Very likely, and yet I feel sure that if he were to preach in any church in the country unannounced and unrecognised, the same sort of sympathetic understanding between him and his audience would at once be established.

A. How do you account for it ?

B. It is what I have been trying to do ever since. That man means business, and does it. There was really very little in his sermon, or its delivery, to which, as it seems to me, most ordinary clergymen of the Church of England might not have attained. Yet here I am in middle life, that which I have described myself to be—a stick. I bore myself and others by writing and reading sermons, but I don't feel in the least that I am actually teaching, or that anyone in the church is really learning. The plain fact is, I ought to be stopped preaching, till I can do it better.

A. If that be so, there is a pair of us. I am not a whit superior to you, probably worse.

B. As I look upon my past life, I can see where I have made mistakes, and have failed to grasp such opportunities of qualifying myself as a preacher as have naturally presented themselves. When it was determined that I should enter holy orders, I was yet at school. The choice was my own : it met with the cordial approval of my friends : there was certainly no apparent reason to the contrary. I suppose I was a good lad, as lads go ; not at all disposed to think lightly of serious things ; desirous in a boyish way to do my duty to God and my neighbour. But I was not wise enough, during the remainder of my school life, to keep my future profession distinctly in view. Ordination was such a long way off, that the thought of doing so perhaps never occurred to me. I treated English composition with the lofty indifference of youths absorbed in classics and mathematics. I

shirked public recitations, just because I happened to be shy, and far too sensitive of the possibility of failure. The Sunday afternoon alternative of writing out recollections of the morning sermon, or of substituting a task of a different description, was invariably decided in favour of the latter. When at nineteen years of age I left school, I could only write the slipshod English of an ordinary letter: and of the management of the voice, and the possibility of self-possession before large audiences, I had learnt absolutely nothing.

A. Your description would serve for most public schoolboys, not excepting those already marked out for holy orders.

B. My university career was considered by my friends to be most satisfactory. I took a highly respectable degree, and not a word could be breathed against my conduct. But here again the desirability of a distinctive training for my intended calling, supplementing that more general training which the

universities provide for all, seems most strangely to have escaped my notice. I heard of sermon-classes, but I never joined them. I belonged to the Union, and sometimes strolled in to hear the debates, but never got upon my legs. I was one of those who snubbed a proposition to found a more private debating society in our own college as priggish and superfluous. From time to time I listened, or thought I listened, to singularly able preachers at the university church and elsewhere ; but it does not seem to have suggested itself to me that this was a privilege which careful observation, diligent analysis, and conscientious thought might have utilised. When one day a college friend showed me a series of texts, and a number of skeletons of sermons, which he was assiduously preparing against his own ordination, I remember how that college friend, now a well-known preacher, got good-naturedly chaffed, and his industry ridiculed as premature. There was a sort of feeling that when once the responsibilities of a clergyman were

assumed, the task of preaching would be easy and natural.

A. What a mistake that is ! Did you go to a theological college?

B. No : my father had already spent all he could afford upon my education, and it was out of his power to give me that additional advantage. Time crept on, and with it that solemn Ember Week which constituted me a deacon of Christ's Church. Then all of a sudden I stood face to face with the fact that I had a sermon to prepare for actual delivery the very next Sunday, and that a similar duty awaited me every week. I was utterly astonished, when I sat down to write that first sermon, to find myself at a loss. I should have been still more astonished, had it not been for those two miserable hours in the bishop's library, when I and my brother candidates for ordination had had a text given us, and some sheets of blank paper, and when there had been a general rubbing of foreheads and biting of pens. Then, however, something might

have been set down to the score of nervousness ; whereas such an excuse could scarcely be made in the comfortable parlour of which I had recently taken possession. It had been easy to choose my subject, but why could I not get on ? How was it that ideas would not flow, and that sentences would not arrange themselves ? What was the use of getting up so frequently to poke the fire, or of standing with my back to it, for so many precious and yet irritating moments ? Above all, why did bed-time arrive, and leave the very first page of my sermon-paper unfilled ?

A. You recall some reminiscences on my part distressingly similar.

B. The next morning found me out of spirits. I had been dreaming that I had got up into the pulpit, and had suddenly remembered that I had prepared no sermon. Between breakfast and dinner I did manage to scribble a few pages, but even my own imperfect taste voted them so bald and unsatisfactory, that in a paroxysm of vexation I

tore them up. What was to be done ? The rapid approach of Sunday was inevitable. My eyes kept wandering towards certain volumes which were ranged upon my shelves. Only a few weeks ago I should have scouted the idea of preaching another man's sermon ; but the climax of that day's work was the settling down to copy, with but few alterations, the admirable though somewhat stately discourse of a divine of the last century.

A. Ah !

B. My first sermon was not a success. First sermons seldom are, except in novels. Over and above the finely-rounded periods not suiting me, I had never before attempted to speak in a large building, and had not the slightest idea of the distinctness of utterance which is positively necessary, to say nothing of the modulations of voice which are greatly to be desired. My performance was not commended, except by my landlady, who was scarcely an independent witness. My vicar told me I must speak up. My vicar's wife

recommended me to be particular in sounding my consonants, for that the vowels would take care of themselves. I was annoyed with both. What right had they to tackle me in that style, just as if I were still a schoolboy?

A. I wish more curates were tackled. My own vicar and his wife were unfortunately silent. Not, I am sure, through the perfection of my initiatory discourse.

B. The failure of my first sermon would have been comparatively of little consequence, nay, it might have had its material advantages, had it taught me how much I had to acquire, and stirred up within me a determination to conquer my difficulties. Unfortunately it had no such results. That I was disappointed, that I was vexed, that I was worried, to find preaching so much more troublesome than I had anticipated, was a matter of course; but somehow I lacked the energy, the determination, I will go farther, and say the common sense, to look the matter fairly in the face. My vicar attempted from

time to time to add a few other admonitions to his hint to speak up, but I showed my resentment so strongly that he soon left off.

A. That is the stupidity of young curates. They are so touchy that you can hardly speak to them about their preaching, as I discovered with mine the other day. Did you continue to copy your sermons?

B. I made a few fresh efforts to compose my own. I could not but remember the ridicule, nay, the contempt, with which I used to regard borrowers. But I allowed myself to be unnecessarily discouraged, before there was a fair and reasonable time for improvement. To a puzzled brain and an impatient disposition those volumes upon my shelves presented an irresistible attraction. Then, too, I managed to obtain possession of the manuscript sermons of a deceased relative, and these were occasionally made available, without even being copied out. Croquet was all the rage in those days, and my great-

uncle's sermons, which were written in a remarkably plain hand, enabled me to enjoy many an additional game. At the end of two years I changed my curacy. I fear that one reason for my doing so was the thought that my stock of sermons could be preached over again. Faithful and diligent, as I believe, in other matters, I had got to dislike, almost to loathe, my preparation for the pulpit. As to delivery, I obstinately refused to believe that it required any improvement. I was scarcely a better preacher ten years after I was ordained than I was at the beginning.

A. But I think you always preach your own compositions now.

B. Generally. Of late years I have acquired a kind of faculty to string sentences together, and since I have had a parish of my own, have certainly felt more than I did the responsibilities of the pulpit. But I have long been convinced that I am only a very moderate and indifferent preacher. Middle life can rarely rectify the omissions of youth.

Since last Friday it has been borne in upon me that I am—a stick.

A. If it is any consolation to you to understand that every word of your experience might find a counterpart in my own, to such questionable comfort you are undoubtedly entitled. I was not particularly fascinated with the Canon ; but I must admit that if his preaching is to be looked upon, as you seem to think, as a standard to which most of us might have attained, I am at least as guilty as you are in having failed to do it.

B. Yet what do such confessions and admissions amount to ? We are London incumbents, clergy exercising our functions in the greatest city in the world. Yet in the practice of that portion of a ministerial office by which we are most judged, we are—sticks !

A. I am very sure that you have exaggerated your own shortcomings, and therefore it is not inconceivable that there may be bits and scraps of usefulness even in my humble efforts. Let it be conceded that we are

sticks ; still, I trust that the sticks are not incapable of striking an effective blow occasionally. At the same time there is far more truth in the view you take than is at all pleasant. Is improvement impossible ?

B. I hope not ! I hope to God not ! But do let us try to impress upon our younger brethren, as well as upon those preparing for the ministry, the immense importance to the Church of England, to themselves, and to the salvation of individual souls, that their powers of preaching should be carefully developed, before the chains of inveterate habit have been twined round them, and they have contracted all sorts of mannerisms, awkwardnesses, and other hindrances to their success.

COLLOQUY THE TENTH.

THE CHURCHWARDENS AND THE SIDESMEN.

SCENE : *The Vestry of a Country Town Church.*

A. Two pounds, three shillings, and eightpence halfpenny ; a very poor offertory. We shall get sadly behindhand with our church expenses. But, of course, everything is out of gear during the vacancy of the living. Any news, Mr. Bittell?

B. No, nothing definite. An elderly gentleman, to whom it had been offered, came down to look at the place in the early part of last week, but declined it. Vicarage too large. Income too small. Dilapidations insecure.

A. Meanwhile the congregation is going to pieces. Church of England congregations

ought not to be so much affected by temporary circumstances, but they are.

C. Well, ours has been falling off for some little time. You see, for the last two years the late vicar has been either ill or absent. Then the curate in charge has not been——

A. Hush! he has scarcely left the vestry. Don't let us abuse the poor man the moment his back is turned. I dare say he does his best. At the same time—hem!

C. How important this appointment is! The welfare of the parish for the next quarter of a century or more may be dependent on it. Surely we ought to have a special prayer for such times.

D. Yes. What a pity it is that the patron lives abroad, and must needs have but scanty information of men and things in England! I wish we could have Mr. Moreson, of Swanfield. He is a most able preacher, and an admirable parish priest. His energies are quite thrown away in that tiny place. How

fond they are of putting the round men into the square holes!

A. Would he come?

D. I happen to know he would. I asked him the question only the other day. He laughed, and said there was no chance of its being offered him, but that it is just the position he would like. As he is young and strong, he would prefer harder work.

E. I have heard Mr. Moreson several times, as we most of us have, when he has come to preach special sermons. He certainly does take hold of you, as it were, directly he gets into the pulpit, and never lets you go till his last word.

A. And not a shred of manuscript! That's the sort of man we want. He is a capital fellow, too, in other ways, as I know well, for I have relations in his parish. Do you think, gentlemen, it would be possible for us to approach the patron in favour of Mr. Moreson?

B. I don't recommend it. You are all

aware that I act as his agent, and may be supposed to know his mind. He is anxious to make a good appointment, but he is a little touchy, and would scarcely like to be interfered with.

C. But how dreadful it is to think that, without intending it, he may send us a man incapable of being heard in our large church, or a man of extreme opinions, or a man rarely leaving his study, or a man with the faculty of offending everybody! The selection may be little to him, but it is almost vital to us. I feel that we ought to have a say in the matter.

B. You would not have these things decided by popular election?

C. No, I see the evils of that, and yet—well, as a matter of fact I scarcely know what I wish; only I don't think that a man living in the south of France——

B. For his health, Mr. Clipson, for his health.

C. For his health or any other reason,

should determine, without guidance or control, the spiritual destinies of this town. Mr. Durton, you are a sort of patriarch among us. I suppose you remember several vicars?

D. Six. It is my seventy-first birthday to-morrow, and I have never lived anywhere but here. When I was a boy, it was old Mr. Quilt. He used to preach for three-quarters of an hour. That's the fact I mainly remember about *him*.

C. I don't wonder you remember that. Fancy a boy being kept on the fidgets for three-quarters of an hour!

D. Then came the short incumbency of Mr. Lolwell. He was a hopelessly indolent man. He used to employ a lawyer's clerk in the town to copy his sermons for him from printed books, and I have heard my father say that, from the manner in which he read them, he could scarcely have looked them over before taking them into the pulpit. The lawyer's clerk was pledged to secresy, but of course the fact oozed out. Mr. Lolwell was

rarely in residence, except on Sundays. He belonged to a London club, and seemed to enjoy club life a vast deal better than parochial responsibilities. He examined me, or rather pretended to examine me, for confirmation. What he did was to say he hoped I was a good boy, and to fill in my ticket.

A. Who came next ?

D. Prebendary Lexicon. No one could charge *him* with indolence, for a harder worker, in his own special way, I never knew. He rarely left his study from morning till night : nay, his housekeeper told me that he often sat up till daybreak. The parish, however, was none the better for his labours, whatever might have been the case with the public at large. The church, the choir, the sick, nearly all local requirements, had to take their chance. As to his sermons, they were miles above the heads of the people, and read in the oddest drawl you ever heard. It was thought an immense gain when he gave place to Mr. Silke.

B. Mr. Silke, I think, was a popular preacher.

D. Yes. For several years he filled the church to overflowing. I have known special occasions when they were obliged to put him in the pulpit, and his curate in the reading-desk, before the doors opened, as there would have been great difficulty in getting them there afterwards. Many of his sermons I remember to this day. When I come across certain texts I seem to see the man before me, and to hear his voice. But Mr. Silke got into debt. He knew very little of the value of money, and his wife knew still less. When he owed heavy bills to half the tradesmen of the town, his popularity fell off. Few people, I think, were sorry when he went off to a proprietary chapel in London.

C. What became of his bills ?

D. Oh, many of them were never paid. It was a great scandal at the time, and did the church immense harm. Good preaching wants to be driven home with consistent

practice. His successor was a ritualist. It was in the early days of ritual, when people were terribly suspicious. No doubt Mr. Reredos made many changes he ought to have made, but he had not the faculty of bringing them about judiciously. He rushed them upon us, without the slightest consultation with churchwardens, sidesmen, or anyone else. Sermons he openly depreciated, as most of his school did at that time, though of late years they have grown wiser. He used to tell us we thought far too much of sermons, and certainly he did his best to make us think less of them. His own rarely lasted more than ten minutes, and were full of 'our holy mother, the Church.' I believe he was a really good man; but things sank very low with us during his incumbency, and many became dissenters.

E. Yet he restored the church.

D. Yes, he restored the church, and did it well. All honour to him for that! Not much of the money was collected in the

parish, but he was most energetic and successful in procuring it from other quarters. It was sad to see, however, how thinly the restored church was attended, and how little influence Mr. Reredos apparently had among us.

A. Our late vicar did better.

D. Much better. He succeeded to the alterations which had been made in the fabric and its services, without any of the unpopularity to which they had given rise. Until he fell into ill health, he performed his duties in a most exemplary manner ; and I feel sure that the memorial window we propose to connect with his name in the chancel will be readily subscribed for.

B. But he never was much of a preacher.

D. No, and I confess in my old age I should like to welcome a vicar who could put into my mind some of those good thoughts, Sunday by Sunday, which it is more and more necessary I should have. I know that I have got into a bad habit of inattention, and Mrs. Durton even insists that I doze.

C. We all want a good preacher. It is not everything, but then it is so much. They have a clever man now at the Independent meeting, and that's where many of our people have gone off.

B. Itching ears, Mr. Clipson, itching ears !

C. I am not defending them, but one feels a sort of right to a good sermon ; not necessarily eloquent, you know, though eloquence is nice, but such an one as can be listened to without any painful strain of mind or body, and some of it at least remembered.

A. The mere matter of voice is of no slight consequence. It is not one clergyman in ten who could be clearly heard in all the nooks and corners of our large church. The folk in several parts of the aisles and chapels have been in sore trouble that way for a long time. The sermons might just as well be in Dutch.

D. Yet that day Mr. Moreson preached for the schools, his voice, without the slightest

apparent effort, rang like a bell through the entire building. I have the greatest respect for Mr. Bittell's opinion, but I do think, considering the overwhelming importance of this appointment, we might run the risk of offending the patron's susceptibilities, and bring before him the name of Mr. Moreson.

A. So do I.

C. So do I.

E. So do I. If it is thought expedient, I will undertake to get up a petition on the subject. I will guarantee a large number of signatures.

B. Well, gentlemen, I should have preferred to keep secret a communication I have received from the patron this morning, but your feelings are so very strong, that perhaps it would be better to make you my confidants. The living having been declined by his wife's uncle, that elderly gentleman of whom I spoke, he has no one else to whom he cares to offer it, and does me the honour to ask if I can recommend a suitable person. I had myself

thought independently of Mr. Moreson, having been delighted with his preaching, but intended to take a little time for enquiry and reflection. After what I have now heard, however, I think I need hesitate no longer. I will write about Mr. Moreson by to-night's post, and feel little doubt we shall get him.

C. Bravo ! You have indeed given us a most delightful surprise.

E. This is first-rate.

A. And the offertories will look up.

F. And our waifs and strays will come back from the Independent meeting.

D. And in my 'old age I shall hear things I can go home and think over.

(They shake hands violently all round, and Mr. Bittell's hand in particular is nearly wrung off.)

COLLOQUY THE ELEVENTH.

THE SCHOOLBOYS.

SCENE : *The Common Hall of a Head Master's House on Sunday afternoon.*

A. Here's a go !

B. What's up ?

A. The doctor has just given orders that we are to write out what we remember of this morning's sermon !

B. No !

C. No !!

D. No !!!

A. Fact ! A lot of that beastly ruled paper is to be given out, so that unfortunately we can't leave big spaces between the lines. The doctor expects the sixth-form fellows to do at least six pages, the fifth-form five, and so on downwards.

B. It can't be done.

C. It's a sin and a shame to expect it.

D. Don't he wish he may get it !

E. It's a regular chouse. Why, I had much rather do what we sixth and fifth form fellows did last Sunday, though that was bad enough—turn a hymn into Latin verse.

A. The doctor is very particular about our not copying, or giving one another hints. The old buffer says he wants to find out what we each of us know independently. The prefect is to see that all is fair. He'll be in, in a brace of shakes.

B. Then let us make the best use of our time. I say, what was the text?

C. I have not the faintest notion.

A chorus of voices. Nor I.

B. I'll be bound Parson Sobersides can tell us. He's the only fellow among us who ever listens to sermons. You see his eyes fastened on the old rector, as if his life depended on it.

F. (*otherwise Parson Sobersides*). Well, what is the use of gaping and yawning, when you can hear things? There are jolly bits now and then.

B. All right, old chap; only give us the text, and be quick about it.

F. I do know the text; but ought I to tell you, when the very thing the doctor wants to find out——

B. Bosh!

C. Rubbish!

D. Humbug!

E. I'll lick you, parson, if you don't let it out at once.

F. Here's the prefect.

Prefect (*entering the room*). Now, all you fellows, the doctor says you are to write out this morning's sermon. He will be satisfied with a single page from the young kids in the first form, but the second must write two, the third three, and so on. Smith, hand round this ruled paper. No, you are not to huddle up together, but to sit apart. Let

me catch one of you copying, and you will see what you will see.

B. O my! We must be upon our p's and q's. Do be goodnatured for once, Peters, and give us a start. First of all, tell us the text.

P. Certainly not. Bickley, you are always cheeky. Let another boy open his lips, and I'll know why.

B. (sotto voce). I don't believe he remembers it himself.

(A pause of a quarter of an hour, during which one pen has been heard going, but the others have been unemployed.)

P. This is disgraceful. With the exception of Fessey, who really seems to be pegging away at something, all you fellows are not writing a syllable. I shall send for the doctor. Smith, go across to the study, and tell the doctor I shall feel much obliged if he will step in.

Doctor (entering). What is it ?

P. I am sorry to trouble you, sir, but these boys seem unable even to begin the sermon. The fact is, they don't know so much as the text.

Doctor. This is bad, very bad. I could hardly have conceived it possible. Well, suppose you tell them the text, Mr. Prefect, and give them the chance of showing that they have not been utterly inattentive.

P. I, sir! Did you say me, sir? Upon my word, just at this moment—— (*suppressed laughter among the boys*).

Doctor. Well, then, I will myself tell you the text. Mr. Prefect, sit down with the others. The text was from the eleventh chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. You had better write the words from my dictation. 'When a strong man keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.' It is a very distinctive passage, with a very distinctive

meaning. Those of you who listened to the rector's sermon could hardly fail to understand what that meaning is.

(The boys write, or attempt to do so, and ultimately give in their papers.)

Doctor (after an interval). I have looked carefully over these papers, and am utterly ashamed of them. A single boy, not a very big one, has done well. His summary of the sermon is really very creditable. But all the rest have miserably failed. One boy says, 'This is a very solemn passage of Scripture,' and stops short there. Another begins, 'A strong man armed is of course a soldier. If he lets another soldier take his armour from him, he must be a coward.' A third, most thoughtlessly, I could almost say blasphemously, remarks, 'The strong man was Christ, but the stronger than he was Satan.' But I will not go on. It is a heap of trash. You are not in the main stupid boys, and yet stupid is the word I must apply to these per-

formances. Now listen. For the future you will occupy a portion of each Sunday afternoon in writing some account of the sermon you have heard in the morning. From the younger boys I shall be satisfied with but little, but from the elder I shall look for a clear and intelligent epitome of what has been said. I am aware that some people would tell me I am going the way to make you dislike sermons. I don't think so. Nothing can be worse than the present state of things. You are forming habits of inattention from which it will be difficult, when you grow older, to shake yourselves free. The way to dislike sermons is to sit in church without listening to them. If I can teach you to 'take heed how you hear,' I believe you will thank me for it by-and-bye. Now, go your several ways this time, except Fessey, to whom I wish to speak.

(A rush from the room.)

Doctor. Come here, Fessey. How old are you ?

F. Thirteen, sir.

Doctor. Who taught you to listen to sermons ?

F. Please, sir, it was my mother.

Doctor. A good woman, I'm sure ; an admirable woman. And do you like listening to them ?

F. I didn't at first, sir, but I do now. Mother told me I should find church-time much more pleasant, if I tried to listen.

Doctor. And do you find it so ?

F. Yes, sir.

Doctor. But I feel sure that making church-time pleasant was not the only reason she gave for wishing you to listen.

F. No, sir, she said I might learn a great deal of good. And—and—she said I was—I was to do what the clergyman said.

Doctor. I hope you take her advice.

F. (*colouring up to his ears*). I'm afraid I don't always, sir, but I do try. It's so hard at school.

Doctor. It is hard, but the very trying is

good for you, and if you go on trying, you are sure to succeed. Not of yourself, you know. Remember what your catechism says about the grace of God, which you must learn at all times to call for by diligent prayer. I feel certain that admirable woman, your mother, gave you some nice private prayers.

F. Yes, sir.

Doctor. Well, my boy, I hope you will give me as full a report of the sermon next week as you have done to-day. You may go.

[*Boy retires.*]

Doctor (soliloquising). That's a nice lad. I'll have my eye upon him. I'm afraid he is not very clever at Latin and Greek, but dear me! there are things better than those. What a pretty kettle of fish this is! Here am I responsible for the education of these boys, some of them quite big fellows, and they are altogether uneducated in the great faculty of hearing the Word of God! In the Baptismal Service the priest says to the god-parents, 'And that he may know these things

the better, ye shall call upon him to hear sermons.' A deal of good that seems to do ! But let me be fair to the lads. I am afraid our good rector's sermons are scarcely calculated to attract young people. Not that this is a sufficient excuse for the display of this afternoon. Fessey showed most conclusively that even a little boy can both hear and understand, if he likes to do so. Still, I do think that the parochial clergy seem to forget how large a proportion of their audience is made up of young people. What with the schools, and what with the junior members of families, the rising generation is sometimes in an absolute majority, and in any case has a substantial claim upon the consideration of the preacher. I don't say that every sermon, still less every part of a sermon, should be hampered by this thought, but it certainly ought to have its proper weight. Of course in many churches there are children's services : but, in the first place, you can't get big boys and girls to consider themselves children ;

and, in the second place, our youngsters ought to be taught to listen to ordinary sermons, not merely to those specially addressed to themselves. It has frequently been suggested that, as far as we are ourselves concerned, we should have a school chapel, and, if we go on increasing, we shall probably build one. School chapels, however, in their Sunday use, have their disadvantages as well as their advantages. Schoolmasters are seldom good preachers. They have but little time to spend in preparation. They have rarely had the training or the experience of the parochial clergy. With a greater knowledge of boys, they are probably more faulty both in theology and elocution. I confess I cannot contemplate our friends Brown and Jones preaching in a school chapel without considerable misgiving. For myself, I am conscious of a mannerism from which I cannot get free, and which would go a long way to incapacitate me from the effective discharge of that duty. Besides, is the relation between masters and boys

always of the sort one would wish to exist between pastor and flock? Is there not in the best of schools an occasional friction which makes it desirable that some at least of the strictly spiritual instruction should come from without? Well, I have no doubt these lads will do better next week. God grant that their shortcomings in this and other matters may not be laid to my charge! That little fellow said he did try, and I shall never forget his look when he said it. I think I try too, but such a discovery as I have made this afternoon does not add to one's self-complacency. What poor creatures we all are, teachers as well as taught, the man in the desk of authority as well as the lad on the form of submission!

COLLOQUY THE TWELFTH.

FATHER AND SON.

SCENE : *A Rectory Lawn. Evening of Trinity Sunday.*

F. Among many things I should like to say to you, my dear boy, upon this, the evening of your ordination as deacon, by no means the least is, that I hope you will try with all your might to be a better preacher than your father.

S. I am sure, father, there is no need——

F. I know what you would say, and I know what *I* could say. In looking back over a tolerably long ministry, I much regret I did not take greater pains, during the early part of it, to improve my preaching. However, no more of that. Do you remember the

verse, 'The preacher sought to find out acceptable words' ?

S. It is in Ecclesiastes, is it not ?

F. Yes ; we are not aware that King Solomon was in the habit of giving oral instruction ; but his very sensible rule may profitably be imitated by those that are. Every preacher whose object is to do good should seek to find out 'acceptable words,' or, as it is in the Hebrew, 'words of delight.'

S. Now, father, I hope you are preparing to give me one of those little disquisitions of which I am so fond. Pray go on.

F. The first, by which I mean the earliest, though not the greatest object of the preacher, is naturally to gain the ears of his congregation. Failing in that, he fails in all. And I assure you, Tom, that this is no light task. Young clergymen generally assume that they are listened to by those before them. Never was assumption more unfounded. Many of them might just as well be fifty miles away.

S. I am afraid that if I may judge by my

own past experience in listening to sermons, university sermons among the number, young preachers are not the only men who fail to attract attention. Somehow one's thoughts, unless exceptionally interested at the outset, have a way of escaping from the preacher almost directly he has begun, and careering all round the world.

F. And therefore while the preacher is not responsible for habits of chronic inattention, probably more the fault of his audience than his own, he is bound to make his words as acceptable, as worthy of being listened to, as possible. Such words don't come without trouble. They have to be 'found out.'

S. All the men who were ordained with me seemed to think that the faculty of preaching will come to them as a matter of course.

F. Then I pity their congregations. Tom, my dear boy, don't entertain any such delusion. Here and there a man of exceptional genius may preach well from the beginning. Beyond all question, however, the vast majority have

to learn this thing. It is one of the dangers of the Church of England that so many don't learn it.

S. Yet no one despises more than you do the means by which some men become popular preachers.

F. In what I am going to say I should wish to speak in the abstract, rather than to be supposed to refer to particular persons. Even the finding acceptable words may be too dearly purchased. It is but the means to an end, and with that end, which is neither more nor less than the building-up immortal souls, the means must not be inconsistent. The words must be acceptable in the sight of Heaven, as well as in that of an audience.

S. A very considerable restriction, I should think, upon the wild and spasmodic ideas of some modern sermons.

F. Yes. The preacher, you see, must not seek to make his words acceptable by propounding error. It was a complaint of God in the olden time, 'A wonderful and horrible

thing is committed in the land : the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so ; and what will ye do in the end thereof ?' It would be a wonderful and horrible thing in this land of ours if priests and people should ever make a practical alliance for the toleration of false doctrine : if the people should say, ' Prophecy not unto us right things, prophecy unto us smooth things,' and if the priests should reply in effect, ' Very well ; we see that is the way to make our preaching acceptable ; we will do it.' To comfort the hearts of those whom God has not comforted, to preach peace, peace, where there is no peace, to send people away satisfied with themselves, when they ought rather to be anxious and apprehensive, this may be a path to popularity, but it is one which leads right away from usefulness. No, better to be dull than to be heretical, to be uninteresting than to be misleading. The very object of seeking acceptable words is that they may wage war upon sin :

it is a strange inversion of purpose to compromise with sin that our words may be acceptable. Even Balaam, who loved the wages of iniquity, was bold enough to say—and never let Christian ministers fall below *his* mark—‘Only what the Lord saith, that will I speak.’

S. Hereby would be swept aside a great deal of attractive and fashionable oratory. Many are drawn to church out of curiosity to see how far clergymen of the Church of England can go in the way of disparaging creeds, and proclaiming a sort of universal salvation.

F. And if the preacher ought not to seek acceptable words by propounding error, neither ought he to do it by holding back truth. There are certain parts of God’s message much more generally acceptable than others. Men would rather hear of heaven than hell, of God’s mercy than God’s wrath, of the Saviour’s exceeding love in wiping out sin, than of their own obligation to conquer it. I need hardly say how much easier it is for us,

how much more delightful, how much more in accordance with our feelings and impulses, to deal with the one set of subjects than the other. But then we are not to be guided and governed in this matter by our personal inclinations. We have to declare the whole counsel of God : we have rightly to divide, as far as we know how, the Word of Truth. Then it sometimes happens that particular doctrines are unpopular at particular periods, or in particular places. There is scarcely any great truth that has not occasionally suffered in this way. The depravity of human nature, justification by faith, the claims of an outward and visible Church of Christ, the resurrection of the body, the efficacy of holy baptism, the laying on of hands both at confirmation and ordination, the preciousness of the blessed eucharist, all these and others have in turn been under a cloud, and may be again. But whatever articles of faith the preacher believes to *be* articles of faith, not mere human traditions, or private idiosyncrasies, these he

must teach to his congregation, as opportunity offers, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. Ananias kept back part of the price of his land from the common fund of the early Church. It is ten times worse than that, deliberately to keep back from God's people, through fear of popular animadversion, part of the faith once delivered to the saints.

S. I am afraid that there are many pulpits in which certain prominent doctrines, though distinctly taught by our Church, are never so much as mentioned.

F. Nor, further, must the preacher seek acceptable words by an undue straining after novelty. The gospel he is called upon to proclaim is not a different gospel every week, but the same gospel. The graces he has to commend, the failings he has to condemn, the helps he has to point out, are the same graces, the same failings, and the same helps. Accordingly there is and must be in his sermons a considerable amount of repetition. How often our Lord and Master repeated him-

self ! How frequently the holy apostles repeated themselves ! How constantly the greatest and best preachers of every time reiterated and elaborated elementary truths ! Some preachers, indeed, in their intense desire to interest their audience introduce into the pulpit topics lying outside of what they would probably call routine Christianity. The debates in Parliament, the actions in law courts, the fluctuations of commerce, the discoveries and contradictions of science, the accidents and offences recorded in the daily and weekly press, are made to garnish, it may be from the best of motives, the Sunday discourses. But, however carefully and reverently this may be done, I doubt, except on very special occasions, its propriety and expediency. Sermons should not resemble the leading articles of newspapers. Our people should scarcely be taught to expect that sort of excitement which comes from the rush of events, and from the surmises to which they give rise. No eagerness for the hush and the

breathlessness of a rapt congregation should prevent our sharing in the spirit of St. Paul, when he said, 'To write the same things unto you, to me indeed is not grievous, but unto you it is safe ;' and of St. John, when he observed, 'I have written unto you, not because ye do not know the truth, but because ye know it, and to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.'

S. Yet we constantly hear complaints of the sameness of sermons.

F. Yes, often from the very people who most need the discipline and security of repetition. Nor, once again, should a preacher seek to make his words acceptable by any artificial or exaggerated method of delivery. The clear voice, the earnest utterance, the characteristic manner, whatever that may be, is highly desirable ; the affected whine, the frantic shout, and the sensational gesture are most undesirable. We are not actors in a theatre, but ambassadors of the King of kings. There must be reality, there must be

simplicity, there must be an absence of simulation in our mode of speaking. We must discard all temptations to arouse sleepy audiences, and to recall wandering minds, by other expedients than those produced by an intense belief in our mission.

S. You have cleared the way by asserting the inadmissibility of several methods of making our words 'acceptable.' I trust you will not confine yourself to negative maxims. To-day of all days I shall treasure up what you say to me.

F. The preacher should try to make his words acceptable by giving his hearers what they most need. This is not always what they most wish. They may wish, for example, quiet and self-satisfied minds ; they may need troubled consciences and awakened fears. But from a careful observation, and from that knowledge which comes of love, he should skilfully adapt medicines to ailments and remedies to necessities. Ultimately, though perhaps not immediately, those words will

always be most acceptable to Christian people which meet the actual requirements of immortal spirits, and help them forward on the pathway to glory. Of course, a serious difficulty is presented in the various classes of minds with which he has to deal. It is not as if a Sunday congregation were all of one sort. There are young and old, ignorant and instructed, sorrowful and joyous, Christians who ought to be built up on their most holy faith, and backsliders who require to be warned of the effects of their transgression. But, by remembering each in turn, and by never allowing thought for one section to exclude anxiety for another, it is doubtless possible to supply from time to time the comfort, the exhortation, the restraining voice, the quickening admonition, which are severally required. And there are some things which never come amiss. When we talk of acceptable words, let us remember that 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save

sinner.' Of all acceptance! The mission of the Son of God, with its touching details and its momentous consequences, is universally applicable, because all are sinners, and all have one hope. Oh, for power in the preacher to tell it, and for grace in the audience to appreciate it!

S. You make me feel the overwhelming character of the responsibility I am assuming.

F. You can hardly feel it too much. This will further appear when I go on to observe that the preacher should strive to find out acceptable words by exerting to the utmost such abilities as God has given him, to commend, to diversify, and to illustrate the message with which he has been entrusted. Somewhat I have had occasion to say about the necessary sameness of his teaching; but this sameness may be relieved by fresh modes of expression, by fresh lights thrown upon familiar truths, by fresh combinations, whether of narrative or doctrine. 'Every scribe,' says our blessed Lord, 'who is rightly instructed in the

kingdom of heaven is like unto a householder which bringeth forth out of his treasures things new and old.' There are plenty of old treasures in the sacred Scriptures and in ancient authors ; there are plenty of new in the writings of modern divines, and in the shifting circumstances of modern life. And it must frankly be allowed that, while reiteration is wholesome, nay, positively essential, it is commonly the fault of the preacher, if to minds anxious to be taught—I don't say to restless hearers—such reiteration becomes burdensome and oppressive. Not to dwell wearisomely and needlessly upon particular points : not to overlook, if I may so express it, the many-sidedness of Christianity : not always to open God's book, whether of nature, or providence, or revelation, in the same place—these are rules which may and do require trouble in carrying out, but which are worth it all in the advantages they produce. For it becomes us to ignore our personal prejudices, and to place a check upon our individual

proclivities, in the consciousness that to narrow our teaching is to mar its usefulness and efficiency.

S. I see that ; and yet how difficult it must be to avoid getting into grooves, and how still more difficult to force one's way out of them !

F. O yes ! As old Newton says :

‘ What contradictions meet
In minister's employ !
It is a bitter sweet,
A sorrow full of joy.
No other post affords a place
For equal honour or disgrace.’

But the preacher should further seek to find out acceptable words by setting before him good models and examples. The best of all is our Lord and Master Himself. The Evangelists only give us fragments and summaries of His discourses ; but the one most fully reported, the Sermon on the Mount, is a pattern in all the marks and characteristics of a faultless discourse. From the striking series

of beatitudes at the commencement to that magnificent peroration touching the two houses upon the rock and the sand, it never flags either in its sanctity or its incisiveness. Then there are the holy apostles. St. Paul, on Mars Hill, eagerly availing himself of that altar to the Unknown God, cheerfully recognising the readiness of the Athenians to feel after external help, quoting their own poets, trying to meet a craving which already existed rather than to startle them with an ideal utterly strange and incomprehensible—St. Paul, I say, both there and elsewhere, is well worth the close study of every Christian preacher. And from the time of our Lord and His apostles downwards, how persuasive have been the words, as well as how beautiful have been the lives, of very many of those who preached the gospel of peace! The echoes of millions of good sermons in past years have died away, but not a few remain; and with these may well be mingled vast numbers, some of them exceptionally beautiful, of the

present day. You and I, my boy, will, I hope, have many opportunities of discussing them together. A preacher, indeed, must not be a servile imitator. He must not be another man, but himself. What is natural elsewhere may not be natural in him ; and time, opportunity, special circumstances, particular congregations, are all elements of consideration. But with these limits, the past and present of the pulpit may well exercise a combined and powerful influence over its periodical utterances. He must be a very clever man, or else a very conceited one, who dispenses with the efforts of his predecessors and contemporaries.

S. Some time I should very much like to know what sermons, ancient and modern, you most admire.

F. I will gladly tell you, although you must take my recommendations with the remembrance that my predilections have no pretensions to infallibility. In the meantime let me add to what I have said that the

preacher should try to find out acceptable words by letting them be accompanied by prayer and faith. It is not altogether the character of his sermons, nor yet the disposition of his hearers, that determines the result : it is the Holy Spirit of God breathing life into the one, and aptitude for instruction into the others. And, hence, there should be both fervid entreaty that good may follow, and a reverent though humble expectation that it will. Those words are likely to be most powerful which are wrought, as it were, on the anvil of prayer, and which go forth, not with the expectation of failure, but in the hope, the trust, the belief, that they will prosper in that for which they are sent. And surely the preacher should invite his people to mingle their prayers on this important matter with his own. ‘For me,’ was the yearning of a great apostle, ‘that utterance may be given me to open my mouth boldly.’ The words that are prompted by an intense desire to meet the real wants of a congregation, that have called forth

all the abilities which a preacher can command, that have been framed by a careful study of the best models, and that are accompanied by prayer and faith, are nearly sure to be found, in the best sense of the expression, 'acceptable words.'

S. Do you prefer written or extempore sermons ?

F. If by extempore sermons you mean those delivered without manuscript, I believe them to be, speaking generally, the sermons of the future. In the sense of being produced on the spur of the moment, very few sermons are, and none ought to be, extempore. But preaching without manuscript has, in my opinion, formed a very material element in the past success of dissent. There is a *primâ facie* reality about it which is rarely communicated to discourses delivered from writing. The Church is very seriously handicapped so long as the majority of the clergy are tied to their sermon-books. This seems to be more and more admitted, with the probable result

that the coming generation will, in the main, leave their sermon-books behind them. Of course there are few rules without their exceptions. Some men will never have the nerve, the self-possession, or the readiness of utterance to preach in this way. I am not maintaining for a single moment that their inaptitude in this particular disqualifies them from being useful ministers of God. Let me go further than that. I know a few men who preach so wonderfully well from manuscript that I cannot even wish them to adopt a fresh method. On the whole, however, I have no hesitation in advising you to cultivate that mode of addressing an audience which will always be looked upon as most natural and persuasive, and in favour of which there is consequently a strong presumption of the greater efficiency.

S. I don't feel at present as if I could ever do it.

F. Well, but like the preacher of old you must 'seek to find out.' I am not urging you

to preach your first sermon without notes—no, nor your second : but, after a while, when you have become accustomed to face an audience, I want you to feel your way towards a facility of expression which will greatly add to your usefulness. Begin, if you like, by writing out what you want to say, and absolutely learning it by heart. Most of our so-called extempore preachers have done this in the first instance. Nay, I happen to know that some of them, though credited by the public with marvellous fluency, have never to this hour emancipated themselves from it. That, I think, is a mistake. I by no means recommend it as a permanent habit, only as an initiatory and educational expedient. My hope is that you will find yourself gradually departing from what you have written down, first in words, then in sentences, by-and-bye in still larger and more expansive particulars. Ultimately, I trust you will be able to construct sermons in thought, without employing the pen at all : or, if you fall short of that, that

a few notes, abandoned when you enter the pulpit, may satisfy your requirements. It goes without saying that all this will require great pains ; but from these you must be ashamed to shrink. Think what persistent pains are taken by all sorts of people to qualify themselves for their positions in life—authors, musicians, artists, doctors, lawyers, artisans, acrobats. It is sad indeed when the minister of God grudges the time and the trouble to perfect himself in one of his most important duties.

COLLOQUY THE THIRTEENTH.

THE BICYCLISTS.

SCENE: *Two Bicycles, slackening pace upon a turnpike road.*

C. Well, Harry, our pleasant tour is about coming to an end. I call it a great success. We have passed through seven counties. We have excited the admiration of more than a hundred villages. We have only knocked down one old woman and three children, and have happily managed it so dexterously in every instance as to do next to no harm. A few trifling accidents have happened to our precious selves ; but we return back on the whole safe and sound, and ever so much stronger and better than when we started. I hope, old fellow, that this will not be our last excursion together.

H. A hope I cordially reciprocate. Yes, we have had a jolly time. I think I have enjoyed most of all seeing the churches.

C. So have I. You see we have both what may be called ecclesiastical proclivities ; you as the son of a parson, and shortly to be a parson yourself ; and I as a clerk in the office of a church architect.

H. We have lost much time occasionally by the churches not being kept open. To find the doors locked and the key difficult to be got at is not improving to one's temper. The convenience of bicyclists and other wanderers may not be the highest argument for churches being kept open, but one would think it was worth considering. The fear of thieves is all nonsense. Open churches, especially in the country, are not more frequently plundered than closed ones.

C. How wonderful it is to come upon so many small villages with such beautiful churches ! It is amazing to me how they got there. Who designed them ? Who paid for

them? How came it to pass that they are so utterly out of proportion with the apparent poverty of their surroundings?

H. Ah, Charley, my boy, the folk of those days might have had their glaring faults, but at least they seemed to consider that the worship of God was to be the first thing thought of, and that no trouble was to be spared about it.

C. We found most of the churches in admirable order. Half a century ago, I suppose, their condition was shameful. A few here and there are still in a frightful state, but even in these cases restoration is evidently in the wind. And let the archæologists say what they will, what has been done has been carried out, on the whole, with much care and judgment, and with great reverence for the history, as well as for the practical utility, of the fabrics. By-and-bye there will be very little left for us architects to do in that way.

H. But I hope you will have plenty of

fresh churches to build, and that they will be as good as the old ones.

C. The services we attended were generally well conducted, and the sermons, as it struck me, quite up to what we hear in town. But, Harry, I don't at all approve of the strange propensity you most unexpectedly developed to poke your head into dissenting meetings. In a member of Keble College, and an accepted candidate for holy orders, it is especially indefensible. A nonconformist place of worship, with a service going on in it, seemed to be an object of irresistible attraction. Now if you believe in episcopacy——

H. Which I do.

C. And if you believe in the possibility of the sin of schism——

H. Which I do.

C. I cannot conceive how you can consistently lend the sanction of your presence to proceedings which—which——

H. Have you done? I know I have often shocked you, old fellow, and I am not sure

that what I am going to say will serve to clear me in your ultra-orthodox eyes. I certainly would not attend nonconformist meeting-houses in my own immediate neighbourhood, lest haply even the very slight influence of my exceedingly insignificant self might have an effect I should be sorry for. But I had a great curiosity to hear what the sermons of nonconformist ministers are like, and thought that, with my clerical future before me, I might never again have a similar opportunity. You see I must pick up wrinkles where I can. There is so much to be learnt about preaching that I am keeping my eyes and my ears wide open.

C. Well, having delivered my little protest, and having heard your defence, which was not altogether unanticipated, though I am bound to say far from satisfactory, I am in a position to listen to your impressions. Of course nonconformist sermons are not up to our standard.

H. I have been formulating my opinions

as I came along, and I am afraid they are not so uncompromisingly churchified as you would wish. Speaking abstractedly, that is, without reference to congregations, I should say church sermons are the best. Speaking as to their capacity for taking hold of congregations, I am driven most reluctantly to the conclusion that nonconformist sermons are the best.

C. But, Harry, that is bad. It sounds at first a sort of half-and-half verdict, but practically it is not so. Sermons delivered in public must surely be judged, not by their intrinsic value, but by their suitability to congregations. I am afraid your taste has been corrupted by your somewhat loose practice.

H. You remarked just now, and I entirely agree with you, that the preachers in church we have come across while on our tour have been quite up to the level to which we are accustomed in London. Yet both in London and the country Church of England sermons are badly listened to. Now nonconformist

sermons, whatever they may be in other respects, do generally command attention. There can be no doubt about it. One has only to look into the faces of the people to be convinced that it is so. In some country places I was much amused to hear frequent groans of assent, occasional exclamations of 'Ah !' and 'That's it,' and now and then an outburst, apparently fervid, of 'Bless the Lord !'

C. You surely would not wish such disorderly things to happen in Church of England congregations ?

H. No, and yet I think I should prefer them to the listlessness that is so distressingly prevalent. They would not be entirely without authority from ancient times. But, Charley, we might have the eagerness and the general interest, without the interruptions.

C. Does it not occur to you that your impressions, if correct, may partly be accounted for by the very different spirit of church and nonconformist congregations, and

that such spirit is not altogether to the credit of nonconformists ? You see our Church of England people 'assemble and meet together,' in accordance with the familiar description, 'to set forth God's most worthy praise, to hear His most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.' Now the dissenters attend chiefly to listen to their preachers.

H. There may be something in that, though I must do the various denominations of nonconformists the justice to say that their singing is seldom wanting in heartiness, and that their prayers, if vastly inferior to our own, seem to carry along with them a considerable amount of reverence and devotion. And, Charley, please to remember that the hearing God's most holy Word ought to include sermons as well as lessons.

C. And then, Harry, there is another thing. Dissenting ministers are aware what stress their people lay upon preaching, and

that, in fact, their efficiency is mainly judged by their prowess in that single point. The consequence is, that they are not only specially trained to preach, but that they are constantly upon their mettle, and spend in all probability much pains in the preparation and elaboration of their discourses. It is otherwise with our church clergy. Preaching is an element, but only an element, in their responsible duties. It is seldom that they are specially trained for it. Their reputation as useful men is not dependent upon it. It may be that some of them don't think enough of it; but we must recollect that there is commonly a multitude of other and perhaps more pressing matters to engage their attention.

H. That is most true. Charley, your knowledge of dissenters suggests the suspicion that your experience has not been so exclusively orthodox as you would have us suppose. I can carry on your line of thought. It is not only that the relative importance of preaching is different in the eyes of the two

sets of men, but that the question of time comes in, and that this is altogether in favour of the dissenting minister. He has no parochial responsibilities. His study is rarely intruded upon. It is seldom that he teaches, or even has the opportunity of teaching, in a day-school. I once fell in with a Wesleyan minister who told me that he ordinarily spent three hours every morning, and three hours every evening, in the preparation of his sermons ; in fact, he clearly considered it the business of his life. Now look at my father. He, as you know, has a London parish. In one way or another he seems to be occupied in it all day long, and has to do his sermonising after the rest of us are in bed. And it is not so different as might be supposed with the country clergy. My uncle George has exactly one of those charges of which it is said, 'What in the world can the parson find to do ?' Well, I scarcely know a more busy man, and all in the way of his profession. Few people have any idea of the duties, paro-

chial, diocesan, charitable, and general, which fall to the lot of an active clergyman in the country, even if he be not, what he is sometimes compelled to be, a guardian and magistrate. My uncle George seems to be at every man's beck and call. If you were to watch him from morning till night, my belief is that you would rarely find ten consecutive minutes during which he is at liberty to be at work at a sermon. And yet I must say frankly that these considerations do not altogether satisfy me. Our clergy ought to be better preachers. It may not be easy to adjust the claims of clashing duties ; but it vexes me to see men with half their ability and a quarter of their education taking audiences by storm, and our Church of England parsons barely tolerated.

C. Softly, Harry, softly ! That is putting the case too roughly. I scarcely suppose that all dissenting ministers take their audiences by storm, or that Church of England parsons, as a body, are only just tolerated. But pray

expand your ideas. I am sure they have been seething in your brain, the while I have been enjoying the prospects.

H. Charley, it would be downright impertinent and ridiculous in me to dogmatise upon such a subject, seeing that I am not yet a clergyman, and that when I am one, I shall probably make a mull of my preaching. If I trust my immature notions to your merciful ears, I would trust them nowhere else. But I do think that church sermons are ordinarily too stilted and artificial. To begin with, so few of them are delivered without book. We have not heard a single sermon of that sort in a single church since we started, whereas in all the meeting-houses I entered there were no others. This in itself gives dissent a tremendous advantage.

C. I am not so sure of that. It saves us a great deal of ungrammatical nonsense.

H. Possibly ; but it also prevents a great deal of sense from finding its way into people's ears. Just test the matter by watch-

ing the countenances of audiences under the two processes. Then, even if sermons are to be written, why should not an easier and more attractive style of composition be adopted, and why should not a little knowledge of elocution, if it be ever so elementary, brighten up the delivery ?

C. It is the fashion just now to run down church sermons, and you have clearly caught the fashion.

H. In so far as the running down, as you call it, is an excuse for inattentive congregations, it is very much to be deprecated ; but what if a candidate for the ministry like myself sets himself to discover why the preaching of the Church of England is to so great an extent a failure, and does so with no other object than to guard against the like adverse influences in his own person ?

C. Ah, Harry, when you mount the pulpit, we shall see what we shall see !

H. You will see, I have no doubt, a preacher full of faults, but perhaps with a

few less for having heard these dissenting ministers.

C. But, Harry, did you hear much heresy now in those—those objectionable places ?

H. No, except so far as the undue elevation of particular truths, and the consequent omission or suppression of others, amount to heresy. On the whole, I was agreeably disappointed, and some of my unfavourable anticipations were upset. I heard several sermons which would have been appreciated and admired in any church. I heard others which would have been almost equally appreciated and admired, had it not been for a little weakness as regards aspirates, and a few roughnesses of pronunciation. In the presence of the great battle going on against sin and unbelief, I wish with all my heart that these men, with so much that is common between us, could be brought back to the Church of their forefathers. Now, Charley, here is a fine level piece of road. Let us have a good spurt, before we enter the suburbs of the great city.

COLLOQUY THE FOURTEENTH.

THE SQUIRE AND HIS GUEST.

SCENE : *The Squire's Dining-room.*

G. Nice country village yours, squire. Strikes me as a model sort of place. Church, hall, school, windmill, duck-pond, parish stocks, and the whole style of thing complete. Got a decentish parson ?

S. Excellent ; and the very best preacher in the country. I asked him to meet you to-night, but unfortunately he has a confirmation class. We must see if we can get him to-morrow.

G. Then you have not quarrelled with him ? I thought squire and parson were rarely on speaking terms ?

S. Nonsense ! He and I are the closest of friends. Why shouldn't we be ?

G. Oh, well, I had an idea—but what was that you said about his being the best preacher in the country ?

S. The very best.

G. That can hardly be, you know. All the best preachers are in London or the big towns. It isn't likely that a really good preacher should be located in an out-of-the-way corner like this.

S. I don't know what's likely and what isn't, but I know what's fact. Why, I hear him nearly every Sunday of my life, and I ought to be able to give an opinion.

G. What's his name ?

S. You won't know his name, though of course I'll tell it you. No one knows his name out of this immediate neighbourhood. That's the strange thing. The names of preachers who couldn't hold a candle to him are household words to thousands upon thousands. Our rector is just an obscure country parson.

G. Perhaps he is a young man, who has

still to make his mark in the world. Good preachers are much wanted in these days. He will probably soon get preferment.

S. You are wrong. He must be nearly seventy, and is not in the least likely to leave, or even to be asked to leave, his present charge.

G. And yet he is a great orator !

S. I said nothing about oratory : I said he is the best preacher in the country, and I'll stick to it.

G. Perhaps, squire, you have not heard our most celebrated preachers ?

S. I've heard them all, or nearly all. In my time I have run a good deal after preachers, and I am sorry to say I have not yet cured myself of that infirmity. Only the Sunday before last I was in London, and managed to get within range of two of them, though at opposite ends of the big village. Well, I don't much care for your celebrated preachers. It's all very well to listen to them once and again, but I should be sorry to do it Sunday

after Sunday. There's a straining after effect, a 'Now I'm going to astonish you' sort of an air, that sets my back up. But few of them preach naturally. Somehow the warmth and energy of their delivery seem forced. They get up the steam as deliberately and mechanically as a locomotive. You can almost hear, so to speak, the piling on of the coke and the manipulation of the handles. Now our rector is different. He just stands up and talks to you. It seems as simple and easy as possible, and yet by-and-bye you find your heart beating, and your eyes filling with tears.

G. Dear me! I don't remember my eyes filling with tears, or my heart beating, at any sermon. How does he do it?

S. I can hardly tell. He 'only speaks right on,' like Mark Antony. I suppose the genuineness of the man, and the utter absence of affectation, have their irresistible effect. Sometimes he explains the gospel or the lesson for the day. At other times he picks out texts

I didn't know were in the Bible, and makes me feel thoroughly ashamed I didn't. Now and then, but more rarely, he refers to the passing events of the times. But whatever he does, you can't help listening to him. I defy you to do it. And if you're not the better for it, it's your own fault. Why, I owe all the good that's in me, not that it's what it ought to be, to that man.

G. Either he must be a very extraordinary preacher, or you must be a very extraordinary hearer.

S. I'm certainly not that : rather under than over the average, I am afraid : prone to nod and gape under most sermons. But, putting me aside altogether, you should see how the faces of our farmers, tradesmen, and labourers light up as he goes on. They clearly take in what he says, sentence by sentence, whether they remember and practise it or not. Now, as far as I have observed, the attention of farmers, tradesmen, and labourers in other country places is rarely caught by sermons at

all. It is the case of Tennyson's Northern Farmer :—

‘ An’ I niver knaw’d whot a meän’d, but I thowt a
 ’ad summut to saäy,
An’ I thowt a said whot a owt to a’ said, an’ I
 comed awaäy.’

G. Do you think he would succeed before more educated audiences ?

S. I am certain of it. He is a highly educated man. Visitors at the hall are at least as much struck by his sermons as the villagers. Over and over again they have remarked, as they left the church, ‘ That man ought to have been a bishop.’

G. It is so common to hear laymen like yourself speak slightly, if not contemptuously, of the preaching of their clergyman, that I am very much interested in what you say. I think you called your rector an obscure country parson. Then he is not the residentiary canon of any cathedral ?

S. O dear, no !

G. An honorary canon probably ?

S. Not even that.

G. Rural dean ?

S. No. Our rural dean is—well, an excellent man, I dare say : I don't wish to breathe a single syllable against him : but a loud-mouthed, pushing sort of a fellow, who would be very careful not to bring any man to the front in the least likely to compete with him in the estimation of the authorities.

G. Living worth much ?

S. Very little indeed.

G. Private means ?

S. Some ; not large.

G. But if you are right in the view you take of this man's exceptional powers, the Church ought long ago to have had the benefit of them in some other capacity. Is there anything against his general character ? Is he lazy and unpractical as a parish priest ? Has he married his cook ?

S. I must shout a loud and emphatic 'No' to all such questions. He is admirable in every

relation of life, and in all departments of parochial responsibility. I always think his position is an apt illustration at once of the glory and shame of the Church of England : of her glory, that such men should be found ministering in out-of-the-way parishes : of her shame, that they should escape the notice of her rulers, and so their striking abilities be confined to small charges. Personally, I am beyond measure grateful that my esteemed friend has remained so long where he is. I know, however, that it is a mistake. Just because he is a modest man, and shrinks from blowing his own trumpet, he has been overlooked. He has never once preached in London, nor in the pulpit of his university, nor in our glorious cathedral, nor, as far as I know, on any great public occasion whatever. Yet what miserable preachers they persistently stick into the most prominent positions !

G. Do you suppose your bishop is aware of his exceptional abilities ?

S. Not he ! I happened to sit near him

at a dinner-party a few weeks ago, and took care to mention our rector's name in terms of warm commendation. At first the bishop said he knew him, but I soon found it was a mistake, and that he was confusing him with a very different person. Bishops, I suppose, are hemmed in, partly accidentally, partly by their own fallible choice, by a sort of charmed circle, who have their ear, and who carefully exclude non-ambitious outsiders. Ah! well, if the Church of Christ has lost by our rector's practical exclusion from the swim of promotion, I know of one man who has gained, in mind, body, and estate.

G. But excuse me, squire. Your rector is probably now too old to change his manner of life: but don't you think that if, in past years, you, as a leading layman of the diocese, had represented his remarkable characteristics to your bishop, his lordship might have been only too thankful to place him where his abilities would have had larger scope?

S. That idea did occur to me more than

once, but I was deterred from putting it into practice by accounts of the bishop's excessive sensitiveness in being interfered with in such matters. My acquaintance with his lordship is very slight, and I shrank from the probability of a polite snub. It may be I was wrong, and that my dislike to part with my friend unconsciously strengthened my reluctance to take action. After all, I have little doubt that our rector is a happier man than if he had been canon, dean, or even bishop. Won't you take any more wine? Then we will join the ladies.

G. (to himself, on his way to the drawing-room). I wonder what is the truth about that parson. The squire is scarcely an independent witness. When a man is conscious of having received great spiritual good from a particular preacher, you cannot trust him to weigh his merits with an unbiassed judgment. I had thought of returning home on Saturday, but I must stay over Sunday, that I may judge for myself.

COLLOQUY THE FIFTEENTH.

LADY GOSSIP'S PARTY.

SCENE : *A London Drawing-room : five o'clock tea.*

Lady G. O my dear ! I have long ago left off listening to sermons. You see we know all that the clergy can tell us, and then they tell it so badly ! Who was that unfortunate man—Onesimus, wasn't it ?—who fell into a deep sleep while St. Peter was preaching at Ephesus ? Even a St. Peter could preach too long, and our modern clergy are not St. Peters.

Duchess of F. I am afraid I have not been to church lately. Of course it's very wicked of me, but I'm rarely up in time on a Sunday morning. So dead tired, you know ! Then

of an afternoon one must have one's drive, and in the evening there's dinner.

Countess of K. I must say I feel it my duty to go to church for the sake of example, though, as dear Lady Gossip says, we know beforehand all the facts and inferences the clergy pretend to teach. I am sure last Sunday the preacher descanted upon the apostle St. Mark till I nearly dropt off my seat with weariness.

Mrs. General Y. I think, dear duchess, and dear Lady Gossip, that if you were to go to hear Mr. Yorrick, of St. Denys, you would be gratified. He is so delightfully comforting. I hate your narrow-minded men, who make you feel discontented with yourself, and send you home in such dreadfully low spirits. Now Mr. Yorrick is liberal in his ideas. He seems to think that all will be saved at the last day, though of course some will be better off than others. You come away wonderfully soothed and satisfied. The very roll of his sentences is delicious.

Lady A. Now I should recommend Mr. Starke, of St. Cecilia's. He's the most original preacher I know. He never takes the same view of a subject as other people. I heard him lately on Jacob and Esau. He said that Moses, or whoever wrote the book of Genesis, evidently thought Jacob the finest character of the two, and that Paul, if indeed he was the real author of the epistles attributed to him, committed himself to a similar opinion. He boldly differed from them both, and gave his reasons, which seemed most conclusive. Jacob was timid, cowardly, underhand, manœuvring. Esau, on the contrary, though he had his faults, was an admirable specimen of the patriarch of the period, bold, manly, straightforward, quick in temper, but ultimately forgiving. But for the unfortunate colouring given to his character by his biographer, and endorsed by Paul, Mr. Starke had little doubt that Esau would have commanded general admiration.

Hon. Mrs. S. Have you ever heard Mr.

Filchurch ? I make a point of hearing him whenever he preaches in town, though it is always difficult to get a seat. He has a most powerful delivery. His words come out whirling, tumbling, seething, hissing, till you are regularly carried away with them, and don't know in the least where you are. It is impossible to remember what he said afterwards, but that is of little consequence, because he has been so eloquent. They say that he always faints away in the vestry, and that his temples have to be covered with brown paper, dipped in brandy.

Mrs. Admiral L. I don't think I care for dramatic performances, like those of Mr. Filchurch. I heard him once, and it seemed to me as if it must have been regularly rehearsed in a greenroom, with every tone of voice studied, and every gesture practised. We get that sort of thing better done at a theatre. You should try Mr. Peewit. He preaches in that church in Chesapeak Square, though how it is he has not been interfered with by the

bishop, I can't think. He goes in for saying queer things. It is so exciting to watch for them, and every now and then to be nearly made to jump off your seat. You can't approve of them, you know, and they are not particularly clever : the oddity is to hear them said in church. It is like hearing a text of Scripture at a farce, or a laugh at a funeral. However, he fills the building, and I confess I often find myself strolling there, in preference to tamer places. His sayings supply me with nice little anecdotes, especially when I slightly embellish them, which of course for the entertainment of friends I have no hesitation in doing. People are so fond of hearing of oddities in church, and all the stories about Rowland Hill, Spurgeon, and others have long ago grown stale.

Miss F. Now I agree with Lady Gossip. I don't care for sermons. The very Bible itself says they are foolishness. I always go where there is a grand choral service, and a good anthem. As the opera is closed on a

Sunday, and as there appears to be a prejudice against regular concerts, I do the best I can, and put up with sacred music. There are really one or two churches which are not far behind the theatres.

Lady A. Who is *your* favourite preacher, Mrs. Melsom ? While we are chatting, you are silent.

Mrs. M. I rarely have the opportunity of hearing celebrated preachers. You see I go to our parish church with my husband and children. I have no objection to hear a stranger now and then, but am well satisfied with our own clergy.

Lady A. Are they eloquent ?

Mrs. M. No.

Lady A. Are they original ?

Mrs. M. No.

Lady A. Do they say queer things ?

Mrs. M. No.

Lady A. And you mean to say that you are good enough to listen to them ?

Mrs. M. I mean to say that *they* are

always good enough to preach things to which I ought to listen. I should be ever so much wiser and better if I listened more attentively. Such a lot of nonsense is spoken throughout the week, that I think I could scarcely keep straight without the Sunday sermons. O no, I don't suppose our clergy are eloquent, or original, and they are most certainly not queer. Nevertheless, I feel very grateful to them.

Lady G. (aside). She always was strange. Has she any special meaning in talking of the nonsense spoken throughout the week? I sometimes think she is a little out of her mind.

COLLOQUY THE SIXTEENTH.

THE ARTISANS.

SCENE : *Workmen leaving a Factory, in a large town.*

Bill. It seems the Leger sweepstakes ain't to be drawn till Saturday. That don't hinder us from doing a little private business. I'll take seven to four agin Kamscatka.

Joe. No, I can only give six to four.

Bill. How does it stand at Tattersall's ?

Joe. Here's the 'Sportsman.' Seven to four at Tattersall's, but only six to four at Manchester. Now I allays go by Manchester.

Bill. Well, I suppose I must put up with six to four. Shillin's, I suppose ?

Joe. Yes, shillin's. How about Vesuvius ?

Bill. They say he has been stopped in his work, but I don't mind taking twelve to one.

Joe. Done! Down they goes into my book, and please remember we settle the Monday after the Doncaster week. I got horribly bitten over some of the events at Goodwood. Private tips all wrong. However, I did a tolerably good thing over them bicycles. Got warm on the winner a fortnight before. Ned, can I do anything with you to-day?

Ned. I think not.

Joe. Hard up, I suppose? It struck me you looked uncommonly serious. Well, we all have our good and bad times. Of course we meet to-night, as usual on Thursdays, at the 'Goat and Compasses'?

Ned. Why, no. Mates, you'll be surprised at what I'm going to say, but I've pretty well made up my mind never to bet again, and to have quite done with the 'Goat and Compasses.'

Bill. Hallo! What's in the wind, now? If you've been down upon your luck, just pluck up your pecker, and try again. Bless your heart, it's been Queer Street with me sometimes.

Ned. It ain't that. Have either of you been to hear these mission-preachers?

Joe. Not I.

Bill. Nor I. Last night I was a-doing a deal better. I was a-listening to a fust-rate lecture at the Mechanics' Hall.

Joe. What was the subject?

Bill. Oh, an old 'un, Capital and Labour. But the lecturer was a 'cute chap, and well worth hearing. He proved even more clearly than I had heard it done before, that labour is shamefully oppressed by capital, and ought to stand up and assert its rights. There'll be a revolution some day.

Joe. P'r'aps, but somehow that time don't seem to get no forrader. It strikes me, Bill, that if we're to help ourselves, we must do it some other way. About these here mission-

preachers. My wife is wonderfully taken with them, but we know what women are. I should have thought, Ned, you were not at all the sort of fellow likely to be humbugged by the parsons.

Ned. You should go and judge for yourselves. There's a man preaching at that there church round the corner, as made me feel one of the biggest fools in creation. I've been uncomfortable ever since.

Bill. That's a good 'un. You want us to go and hear a fellow who'll make us feel the biggest fools in creation, and keep us uncomfortable all next day. A likely thing !

Ned. But, Bill, if so be it's true we *are* big fools, is it not better that we should know it, that we may have a chance of becoming wiser men ?

Bill. I'll warrant these big, spouting parsons, who go about the country, holding what they call missions, are well paid for what they do.

Ned. Nothing of the sort. That lecturer

of yours no doubt was paid, but I happen to know these preachers don't receive a single sixpence. The man I heard has a parish of his own, but is giving up a holiday to try and do some good in our town.

Joe. How did he show you to be a fool, Ned?

Ned. Well, I'll try and explain ; but I wish I could tell you how earnest he was, and how he pinned me down like. There wasn't no escaping him. He began by telling us that he was a-going to speak to us of two great subjects which very closely concerned us all, Life and Death. He said he did not propose at present to give us his personal opinions about them, because he thought the best way would be for us to consider, first of all, what our own was.

Joe. That seemed fair.

Ned. Did we think we should live for ever?

Bill. A stupid question.

Ned. Did we know how long we should live?

Bill. Another stupid question.

Ned. Were we quite certain that we should live another year, or even another day? A cold shiver came over me, mates, for I remembered old Dan dropping down dead at our loom.

Bill. I hate that style of thing. What good does it do?

Ned. But you see, Bill, you're hating it don't alter nohow the sort of fix it stands in. Next, he enquired if we thought we should be done with when we died, like the beasts, and the birds, and the insects?

Bill. I don't suppose we shall be altogether done with : though who can tell ?

Joe. I'm quite sure *I* shall not be done with : don't feel in the least like it. I'm not a religious man myself, but I grant you as much as that.

Ned. Then he wanted to know whether our own consciences did not tell us that the sort of life we are to live on the other side the grave depends upon what we think and

do now. Bill and Joe, I won't pretend to guess what your consciences say, but mine says Yes!

Joe. That's an uncommonly orkard question, Ned, lad. I think I'd rather not tackle it. How did he go on?

Ned. He begged us not to put it from us, like cowards, but to meet it like brave men. He sketched the sort of life so many of us lead, the drinking, the betting, the swearing, the filthy talk, the Sundays spent in hanging about and smoking, God Almighty never so much as thought of. Joe and Bill, old chums, it was *my* life. And he seemed to look us through and through, as he asked if we believed that this was the sort of life likely to serve us when we have to go.

Bill. I've heard all that before. It's cant!

Ned. And so have I heard it, I suppose, but somehow it never came home to me as it did last night. It was scarcely so much preaching, as making us preach to ourselves.

We was somehow obliged to answer his questions innards, though never a one spoke a word, and you might have heard a pin drop. And then he said one thing which struck me all of a heap. The very words seem to stick to me. He declared it was the most foolish of all foolish things, the most monstrous of all monstrous things, the most terrible of all terrible things, to have a belief in such matters, and not to try to act up to it. Bill, lad, that's not cant : it's common sense.

Joe. Then you intend going again to-night?

Ned. Yes, certainly, for he promised to tell us what he himself believes about Life and Death, and I want to know. In the meantime he turned sharp off upon another tack. Putting another world out of the question, did we feel satisfied that we were making the best of this? Was it our deliberate opinion that we were as happy as we might be, and as God intended us to be? Did we find intemperance happiness? Did

we find betting happiness? Did we find filthy language happiness? Did we feel particularly 'happy on Sundays, when we were hanging about with our hands in our pockets, and short pipes in our mouths, while the bells were ringing for church? What had we to fall back upon, if trouble came? Was it not possible that there was a happiness within our reach which we had not got? 'Suppose,' he said, throwing up his hands, 'that you are spoiling two worlds!' Mates, I'm very much inclined to think we are. Many of us at our factory are rollicking blades, but I'm not sure that the happiest man in it isn't Methodist Charley.

Bill. Now I've just got you, old chap. You are seized with a queer shiver, you get struck all of a heap, and you are mortally uncomfortable the whole of the next day. Yet you fancy that the listening to such stuff as this is to make you happier!

Ned. It's not the listening now, but the not having listened long ago, that upsets me.

You see, lad, I can't have the last^v twenty years over again, and it's borne in upon me how much better it would have been for my wife and children, let alone myself, if I'd done different. Bill and Joe, we've been chums in a many things: let us be chums in this. Come with me to-night, and hear this man. Capital and labour is all very well, but perhaps there's a shorter cut to being happy than that there revolution which is allays being talked on, but which don't seem to get no nearer.

Joe. I think I'll go with you, Ned. It will do me no harm at all events. I should like to see the fellow that can convince me, unless I choose. But I don't deny your parson seems to put it plain and strong. That's what I approve on. If they are to speak at all, let 'em speak out. Parsons beat about the bush till you quite lose sight of 'em, ay, and the bush too. I got that tired of 'em, that I have not been inside a church for a many years.

Bill. Nothing shall take me inside of one. I've never been since I was a young shaver in a Sunday-school, and don't intend to. It is plain you two chaps intend to turn methodisses. Wish you joy of it! But I say, Joe, I shall expect yer to pay those bets, if yer lose 'em.

Joe. O yes, we'll stand to the bets, and I don't say I won't bet again. I'm not a methodiss yet. Seems to me, though, Ned's preacher may happen have got hold of the right end of the stick.

Ned. As to methodisses, it isn't methodiss I shall turn, if I turn at all. I shall go to that there church. It's worth a calculating, Bill, whether I shall be happier a inside of it, or you, a waiting in your shirt sleeves at your door for the opening of the 'Goat and Compasses.' If there was a way of deciding on it, I don't know but I'd make my last bet about it, and it should be a ten to one-er. And when I look at the pulpit, I shall always think of that man, even if he's far away.

COLLOQUY THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE DETECTIVES.

SCENE : *A Railway Carriage. Two Gentlemen and a Lady.*

A. And you will scarcely believe it, sir, but I caught him out again. It was a sermon of John Henry Newman's.

B. Was the sermon a good one?

A. Very good. Those sermons of Newman's, before he left the English Church, are, I believe, considered some of the best in the language.

B. But you remembered it?

A. Well, I can't say I remembered it, but there was a something in the flow of the sentences that made me think it might be

Newman's. When I got home, I went to my bookshelves, and found it to be as I have said. Scarcely a word altered ! The impudence of the fellow, strutting in Newman's plumes !

Mrs. C. Quite shameful.

A. Unfortunately for the parsons, I had a clerical uncle who bequeathed to me his library. It included numerous volumes of sermons, of all sorts of dates, and by all sorts of preachers. I often amuse myself by trying to discover these barefaced acts of spiritual larceny. It is astonishing how frequently I am successful. I have arrived at the conclusion that we can seldom be sure of a preacher's sermon being his own.

Mrs. C. How scandalous ! Now I rather think our vicar does preach his own sermons, but then we have them over and over again, at only a few years' interval. As he has been with us more than twenty years, we have heard some of his discourses five or six times. It is my invariable habit to keep a register of the texts, and so I know. The sermon last

Sunday morning was first preached soon after he came to the living, and has been repeated, on the same Sunday after Trinity, certainly twice, and I think three times, since.

B. Was it a good sermon ?

Mrs. C. O yes! I don't wish to say a word against the sermon itself.

B. But you remembered it, almost sentence by sentence ?

Mrs. C. Why, no, I'm not good at remembering, but I can answer for the accuracy of my register of texts.

A. The clergy preach to us laymen the obvious duties of honesty and straightforwardness : yet they stand up in the pulpit, and seek to gain credit from what has really come from the brains of other people.

Mrs. C. And they insist upon the practice of industry in our various stations : yet they preach the same sermons ever so many times, just to save themselves tronble.

B. I should like to talk this matter out. It has often occurred to me, as a layman, that

much may be said on the other side of these questions. As I understand it, you, my good sir, lay it down as an incontestable proposition that when a clergyman preaches a sermon which is not his own, he commits a sort of fraud, and seeks to obtain credit from other people's labours. And you, my good madam, lay it down as a further proposition that for a clergyman to preach a sermon more than once, even though it be his own, is objectionable, and a sign of indolence.

A. Most certainly when a preacher gets up into the pulpit he practically says, 'I am going to tell you my thoughts upon such and such a subject.' The congregation understand that to be his meaning, and what is more, he wishes them to understand it.

B. But suppose his thoughts on that topic happen to be much the same as Newman's thoughts, but suppose Newman expressed them in better and clearer English than he can hope to command : is he to be debarred from giving his people the benefit of the superior

statement? I observe you assume that the object of a preacher is to gain credit. Is it not just possible he may not think of gaining credit at all, but of doing good?

A. That is one way of looking at it: but in such a case had he not better say, without any sort of concealment, 'Now I am going to preach a sermon of John Henry Newman's'?

B. Most certainly, if you are correct in your assertion that he is otherwise passing a deception upon his people. But is it so? He would probably dispute it. He might say that there is no law either in Church or State that the sermons he preaches must necessarily be his own; that, on the contrary, the Church of England, in providing homilies as alternatives to sermons, seems distinctly to imply that he may avail himself of other people's labours; that clergy in deacons' orders are sometimes positively prohibited by their bishops from presuming to deliver their own compositions; that, even when they have become priests, and

have much preaching to do, they are not unfrequently recommended by the same authorities to adopt the practice of writing one original sermon a week and borrowing the other. In all this he would maintain that there was not meant to be the slightest fraud, for that those who care to know that he occasionally makes use of the thoughts, and even the language, of others, are quite welcome, as far as he is concerned, to the information.

A. Then why not let the information be publicly given ?

B. That is easily said, and sounds exceedingly plausible; but when you come to think of it, there are practical objections, quite apart from considerations of credit. A clergyman very rarely copies a man's sermon just as it is. He adapts it, or tries to adapt it, to his own delivery, and to the special circumstances of his congregation. He omits, he inserts, he alters, he makes it more or less his own by re-casting, probably simplifying, many of the

sentences. The sermon as a composition may not be improved by such a process, but it may suit the preacher better, and, as he hopes and believes, his people. To give out that it is so and so's would be manifestly misleading, while any attempt to explain the extent to which it is so and so's would be complicated and absurd. Nay, sermons are frequently made up from various sources, the different portions being so dovetailed into one another as to defy intelligible description.

A. You cannot deny that clergymen are generally annoyed when it is found out that they have been pilfering from others. That scarcely looks like an entire absence of the spirit of deception.

B. Some, no doubt, are annoyed, and I do not say that the subject is free from difficulty. The difficulty is in a great measure created by persons like yourself who persist in regarding copied sermons as spoken frauds. A clergyman is naturally vexed at being considered guilty of a dishonourable practice, when his own con-

science acquits him of anything of the sort, and when he has been honestly doing his best for his congregation. But just consider a moment. Would it be well that all the good sermons that ever were written, comprising some of the most valuable compositions this world of ours has to show, should be entirely unknown, except to the comparatively few who are fortunate enough to possess them, and to read them? Do you really think it would be a gain that they should be altogether banished from our pulpits, in favour of the crude compositions of country curates, or even the productions of town incumbents, whose goodness may be larger than their brains?

A. Then you are an advocate of wholesale larceny?

B. I don't think larceny is a correct term for it. If dead preachers could come back from their graves, they would surely be gratified to discover that they, being dead, yet speak. As to living preachers, I have never

known them otherwise than pleased, not to say flattered, to find their sermons appropriated by their brethren.

A. But your argument seems to carry you too far. It would make original sermons the exception instead of the rule. If a clergyman is bound to give his people the best discourse he can lay his hands on, it would rarely be his own.

B. No, and the entire question requires more careful consideration, both from clergy and laity, than it generally receives. The tendency of my remarks, as far as they have gone, certainly requires some qualification. It must be remembered that it is not the absolute goodness of a sermon, but its suitability to both preacher and congregation, makes it a success. A discourse may have very little literary merit about it; yet if it clearly comes from the preacher's heart, and if his knowledge of his audience has enabled him to fit it to their wants, it may be practically better than any he could borrow.

Plain John Smith may at times be superior to great Lancelot Andrewes.

A. I cordially endorse that. A good delivery is more than half the battle, and a parson's delivery of another man's sermon can rarely be good. It is reading, not preaching.

B. The subject is complicated by the growing practice of delivering sermons without manuscript; a practice which, within certain limits, and without wishing to see its universal adoption, we most of us approve. Of course it goes against borrowing.

A. One would think so, and yet it is not entirely free from—I beg your pardon—larceny. I have known a man deliver a sermon of Melvill's got by heart, word for word.

B. That is assuredly not a practice I can commend, and I am glad to think that from its very difficulty, if from no other cause, it is not likely to be general. Yet if a preacher studied one of Melvill's sermons, and re-

produced the substance of it in his own words, he could scarcely do better. Perhaps the worst plan of all is the purchase of those lithographed discourses with which certain publishers tempt lazy priests.

A. Your views have rather startled me. What are your conclusions ?

B. I am not disposed to speak positively, where I perceive there are so many points of view, and where it seems impossible to lay down stringent rules. I am clear that the world would be worse off if it heard no borrowed sermons. I am clear, further, that even the best preachers should not hesitate to avail themselves of the wealth of thought to be found in printed sermons, ancient and modern, however much they may assimilate it to their own methods of arrangement and expression. I should never dream of thinking the worse of a man because I happened to find he owed the gist of his sermon to someone else. On the other hand, the most effective discourses are probably those in

which a preacher's individuality, his acquaintance with his people, even his idiosyncrasies, are most strongly marked. No conviction that he is justified in availing himself of other people's labours should hinder him from spending what time and trouble he can in preparation for the pulpit. Both for his own sake and that of his audience, it must be a bad plan to depend exclusively, even generally, upon extraneous aid. He should be left free, in my opinion, to consult the best interests of his congregation in his own way : but such freedom should be accompanied by a grave sense of responsibility, and an accurate knowledge, if possible, of the strong and the weak points in his personal qualifications.

Mrs. C. And surely he ought to be stopped from preaching the same sermon more than once.

B. Why ? How few of us remember a sermon a year or two after it has been delivered ! How few of us would even be aware that it has been preached before, if it were not

for some register of texts ! A clergyman writes a sermon let us say on the gospel for the day. He takes great pains with it, and brings out what he conceives to be the true teaching of the passage as clearly and incisively as he knows how. Three or four years afterwards the same Sunday comes round. He may not improbably have had other sermons to prepare, or his parochial duties may have interfered with his hours of study. Is there any intelligent reason why he should not deliver that exposition of the gospel for the day a second time ? Its recognition, even by a small number, would be a presumptive proof of its exceptional excellence. You have hinted at clerical indolence. Pray, madam, have you any idea how long it takes to write a sermon ?

Mrs. C. I can't say I have : perhaps an hour or so.

B. I should recommend you, some time or other, to get a book of sermons, and to copy one out, just in order to ascertain the

extent of the mere manual work, quite irrespective of composition.

Mrs. C. Then our clergy should save themselves labour by preaching extempore, which we should all like so much better.

B. I think it would be found that so-called extempore sermons, if they are worth much, take more time in preparation, and certainly more wear and tear of brain, than others. We are so accustomed to have sermons produced for us, that we have very little notion of the toil they indicate. We assume that they spring into existence by some easy and spontaneous process, and that they are attended by no particular effort on the part of their authors. It so happens that, having clerical relatives, I have been a good deal behind the scenes. I know the heavy burden of two sermons a week, sometimes more, upon hard-worked men. In my humble opinion, neither of the propositions which incited me to take part in this little discussion can be rationally maintained.

COLLOQUY THE EIGHTEENTH.

HODGE AND HIS WIFE.

SCENE : *Through the Meadows, on the way
from Church.*

H. That wor a main good sarmin.

W. It wor. He did stand up to it straight.

H. I'll tell yer what, old 'ooman : if that there mon allays preached, I'd never go to meetin'.

W. Then I wish he did allays preach. You know you never didn't ought to go to meetin'. Parsons is parsons : but what them is as preaches atmeetin', who can say ?

H. My opinion is that parsons is as parsons does. I don't understand nowt of what they calls nordination and that, but I knows a good sarmin when I hears un.

W. But our rector says we don't go to church so much to hear sarmins as to worship God.

H. That's all roight, no doubt, but he do preach sarmins, rector do, and they baint fust-rate. Not but what they may suit the squire and the doctor, and may be the farmers, but bless yer, they don't suit me.

W. A noice judge o' sarmins you be. There's niver a better mon in the parish to shear a sheep, or to keep a plough straight, but what do yer know of sarmins ?

H. I knows when they does me good. That there mon this arternoon has put thoughts into my yed as'll stick there all the week, when I be's in the lanes or on the lond.

W. But do yer mane to say that them preachers at meetin' is up to that gemmon we've been a hearing on this arternoon ?

H. Noa, wife, I don't say that : he's a cut above 'em, he is ; and as I tell'd yer, if I could allays hear him at church, it's uncommon little they'd see of me at meetin'. But, heart

alive ! he do come from a distance, he do. Next Sunday as ever is, rector'll be at it agin. Them as preaches at meetin' baint allays very smart at it, and they says the same thing over and over. But I can foller 'em, lass, I can foller 'em.

W. But rector be a good mon. Only Friday he dropt into our place, and you can't think how koind and comfortable he wor. Stroked the cat, and all.

H. But he baint no preacher.

W. The children are right down fond on him. You know he taches on 'em at school, and gives 'em little story-books. Willie and Annie have both got quite a nice few on 'em.

H. But he be of no account in the pulpit.

W. Don't yer remember how he came ever so many times when you was ill, and brought yer grapes ?

H. The grapes was good, but the sarmins, they be bad.

W. And I should like to know who got Tom his place on the railway ?

H. That wor rector, that wor. I up'd and thanked him for it with all my heart. But he be no better nor an old owl when he gets up them stairs.

W. I calls it ongrateful, considerin' all them things, and a many besides, that you vexes rector by going so often to meetin'. I know it do vex him. He have mentioned it several times.

H. I be sorry to vex rector. I allays touches my hat to him when I meets him, and he says 'Good day,' cheerful loike. But, old wench, I mun look to myself. I baint a clever man. As thee knowest, I can't read, to say read. When I was a youngster, readin' and writin' was for the gentry. I want to be larnt someat. I want to have what good feelin's I has, and I wishes there was more on 'em, kept brisk. Somehow I allays finds myself a noddin' and a gapin' afore rector's well into his sarmin. He don't take no hold. People is a noddin' and a gapin' all round me. Woife, we don't often take different soides, you and

me, but we does in this. I loike church sarvice a deal better nor meetin' sarvice, but church sarmins in this here village is nowt.

W. Well, I shall stick to the church, I shall. I can't argify, but I feels it's a deal roighter. Aint God's blessing better nor sarmins ?

COLLOQUY THE NINETEENTH.

WAIFS AND STRAYS.

SCENE : *A London Square in a storm of wind and sleet: two dilapidated Street Arabs.*

R. I say, Foxey, where is your fingers? Mine feels as if they was a droppin' off. It's awful cold.

F. That it just is, and this here snow soaks into one's wery bones. Rattletraps, old chap, where is you a goin' to sleep to-night?

R. Twopenny shake-down at Simpson's: but he don't never let us in till nine, and I think I shall be dead afore then.

F. I ain't got twopence. The wind, it turned an old gemman's umbrella inside out, and I helped him to put it right, I did. He

poked his hand into his pocket, and I thought he was good for a tanner, but he said he hadn't got no change.

R. Look, Foxey, at that there church. How jolly the lights are ! There's goin' to be a service. Let's get inside the porch.

F. I dursn't. The beadle, he'd chivy us away. *I* know him. 'Tother night he got holt o' my collar, and a'most tore it off. I guv him a nice kick, and didn't he holler out, and call for the perlice ! But I dodged him, and cut away. He's a beast, and I'm glad I hurted him, but I won't go a-nigh him agin, not if I know it.

R. But, Foxey, I'm just a perishin'. My teeth is a rattlin' in my head. I'm sorry now I runned away from home, though father, he did leather me, and mother, she said as she never wanted to see me agin. I'm afeared they'd murder me if I wented back, but I've half a mind to try it on.

F. Rattletraps, if you do go back home, do you mind givin' me that twopence you've

got ready for Simpson's? You allays was a good-natured cove, and I aint got no home to go back to. Them dry arches is just death a night like this.

R. I a'most think, arter all, that I'd rather die in this here square than be killed by father. He'd come home drunk, he would, and drop down upon me fearful. But, Foxey, I'll tell yer what. If I ain't dead at nine o'clock, I'll take a penny straw at Jones', instead of a twopenny shake-down at Simpson's, and you shall go shares, along o' the other penny. If I'm dead, then you can fork the twopence out o' my pocket.

Lay Helper (coming on the scene). Why, my poor boys, you seem to be in a bad way. Come with me to our mission-room.

F. (suspiciously). What's a mission-room, master?

L. H. Well, it's a place with a nice warm fire, where you can dry your clothes, and perhaps hear something to your advantage into the bargain.

F. You ain't a bobby out o' uniform?

L. H. No, I'm not a policeman. You needn't be afraid. Just follow me along a street or two, and we shall be there.

R. (*to his companion*). Let's go. I ain't got no fingers left, nor toes, and my nose is a goin' fast.

(They reach the mission-room. The boys dry their clothes at a fire near the door, making thereby a great steam. A sort of service is beginning at the other end of the room.)

F. Listen, Rattletraps. Them little kids up yonder is a singin'. It sounds pretty.

R. Foxey, lad, I'm a beginnin' to come to life agin. I thought it was about up with me.

F. Hark! They keeps a singin' 'There's a Friend for little children.'

R. Blest if I think there is. Leastways, I never knowed one, when I was a little un. Oh, ah! He's 'above the bright, blue sky,' is He? That explains it. I knowed He wasn't here.

(*The two boys listen to the singing with much curiosity. It comes to an end, and a Mission Preacher stands up.*)

Mission Preacher. When I gave notice that I should speak to-night about Children's Prayers, I little thought how cold it would be, and how many children would be kept away by the driving snow and bitter wind. I am not surprised to see no little girls here at all, and only a few boys. But I shall go on all the same, only I shall be very short, as some of you may be wet. You two lads down by the fireplace can stay where you are, for your clothes are still steaming. No, don't run off; there are none but friends here. I'm going to tell a story, and while I tell it, you can be getting dry. I hope you all know that the Bible is the best and truest book in the world. Now there is a verse in the Bible which says 'The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' That means that if a good and holy man prays to God, he will either get what he asks for, or something

better. But that is not to be my text to-night. You might say, 'I am not a man at all, still less a righteous man.' And therefore I shall take Genesis xxi. 17—'And God heard the voice of the lad.' Those of you who have Bibles find the place. The lad! who was he? A boy about thirteen years old, and not, I am afraid, a very good boy. He had been turned out of his home—why do you think? because he had been mocking and teasing his baby brother. Some of you have baby brothers and sisters of your own. Don't mock them; don't tease them; nurse them gently; play with them carefully. You know you were once babies yourselves. Little infants are such weak and helpless things, that everybody should be good to them.

R. (aside). I warn't allays good to our Sally. I used to nip her. Then she yell'd, and mother taked her and shaked her. I wish now I hadn't done it. I wonder if I shall ever see our Sally agin.

M. P. When a London lad is driven away

from home, he has the streets to go into. A strange life he generally leads. In the summer-time he sleeps under dry bridges, railway arches, and other queer places ; but in the winter-time he is badly off indeed, especially when he is not able to earn enough for a bed.

F. (aside). That's us. I'm about sick of it all, and I sometimes think I shall kill myself. Oh ! but this fire's nice.

M. P. But the lad I am telling you of, whose name was Ishmael, had no streets to go into, no jobs to earn money by, no dry arches or railway bridges to sleep under. He found himself in a wilderness, a place full of sand, with a hot burning sun overhead. The water in his bottle was spent. His throat was dried up. His strength was exhausted. His mother, who had been driven away with him, was no longer any good to him, for she was utterly broken down both in body and in mind. She cast poor Ishmael, faint and helpless as he was, under a shrub. Then she

went a good way off, as it were a bow-shot for she said, 'Let me not see the death of the child!'

F. (aside). That wor cowardly, that wor. She ought to have stuck to him.

R. But my mother never stuck to me, not when my father was a larruping of me dreadful.

M. P. Now I told you that Ishmael had not been a good boy. It was very much the other way. Yet he had been most carefully taught. He was the son of a father of whom it had been said, 'I know him, that he will command his household and his children after him, to keep the right way of the Lord.' You will perhaps wonder why this excellent father had sent Ishmael away from him. Well, I have not time to explain it now, but it seems it could not be helped, though he was very sorry about it. And Ishmael, wayward lad as he was, had probably learnt at least one good thing. He had probably learnt to pray. He must have known that there was a Friend

above the bright, blue sky, who could hear him everywhere and at all times. And so, in the midst of his great trouble, it seems likely that he cried out to God ; cried out to Him underneath that shrub ; cried out to a heavenly Parent, when an earthly father had sent him away into the wilderness, and an earthly mother had turned her back upon him.

R. (aside). Foxey, did you ever say a prayer ? I used to say one once, when I was a little shaver. It was a lady what taught me, but I forget it now.

F. No, I never did. I've allays been about the streets, and nobody never taught *me*. I once got cotched and sent to school, but bless yer, I warn't there long.

M. P. I don't suppose Ishmael's prayer was a very grand one. We hear of the 'voice of the lad,' and I like to think that it was a real voice, not merely a wail of pain or exhaustion. Perhaps it was not unlike this, 'O Lord, I am very sorry I have been such a bad boy, but please have mercy upon me, and I

will try to do better.' Well, many a prayer as simple as that has been heard above the clouds.

F. (aside). D'ye think that's true? That young chap must a bin too weak to holler out loud.

M. P. But if, as some think, Ishmael did not pray at all, but only sighed and groaned, then the goodness of Almighty God towards him is still more wonderful. It shows how God remembers people in their distress, even when they are silly enough to forget Him. But be that as it may, prayer or no prayer, the cry of Ishmael found its way to heaven. And now see what God did for him. There came a blessed angel, and said to his mother, 'What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Lift him up, and hold him in thine hand, for I will make of him a great nation.'

F. (aside). I wonder whether our voice was heard when we was a perishin' in yon square. We never prayed, but that man as

brought us to this here fire was very like a blessed angel.

M. P. A great nation ! Think of that ! A great nation of the child gasping for drink under the shrub ! Well, Hagar opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. How it came to be in the midst of that wilderness, I can't tell you ; but if it was not there before, God, who can do all things, could easily have put it there. It just saved Ishmael. He afterwards grew up to be a famous man ; not so good a man probably as his brother Isaac, that lad whom he had mocked ; but still, I hope, trying to do his duty, as far as he knew how. He was a mighty archer or hunter. He had no settled dwelling-place. His hand was against every man, and every man's hand was against him. But it is very pleasant to read that God was with him. God was sure to be with him, if he had habits of prayer. And if God be indeed with us, my dear boys, with us, not to be provoked every day with our wickednesses, but to smile upon

us and to bless us, then it matters very little what we are, or where we are, for we must be happy indeed.

R. (aside). I should like to be a mighty archer. An archer is a man what shoots. P'r'aps I'm part o' the way to it, Foxey, my boy, cos I'm wery sure my hand is agin every man, and every man's hand is agin me.

M. P. I must just make you take away a few short lessons. First, God hears boys' prayers. All of you repeat that together.

Boys at the top of the room (simultaneously).
God hears boys' prayers.

M. P. Next, God hears us wherever we are. It is good to pray in a mission-room. It is still better to pray in a church. But, O dear! we need not be in a mission-room, or in a church, to be heard by God. We may be at the corner of a street, or in our beds, or, like Ishmael, under a shrub. Only let us be in earnest, and He is sure to hearken to us. Now all altogether! God hears us wherever we are.

Boys (simultaneously). God hears us wherever we are.

M. P. Another thing. God hears us, even when we are bad. Ishmael had behaved badly enough. We don't know how far his teasing and mocking had gone, but the end of them was that even that good man, Abraham, said that he must be off. But what a mistake it would have been for Ishmael to say, God is angry with me, and won't hear me. Why, it was just because Ishmael was bad, that there was a double need for his praying. Now I am afraid some of you boys have been bad. I am very sorry for it, but it need not hinder you from praying, if only you mean to be better. Again, all together! God hears us, even when we've been bad.

Boys (simultaneously). God hears us, even when we've been bad.

M. P. And then only one thing more. God always answers prayers. Always? Yes, always. There never was a real prayer since the world began, which God did not answer.

Not, perhaps, at once ; not, very often, in the way we expect ; but more than either we desire or deserve ; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. Ishmael was shown a well, or fountain, of water. God will show every one of you some welcome gift, if you will only ask Him. Now once more, all together ! God always answers prayer.

Boys (simultaneously). God always answers prayer.

M. P. You shall go in another minute or so, but I should just like to teach you a little prayer before we say Good night, because some of you may not know one. Kneel down on your knees, and repeat the words after me.

(The rest of the boys kneel at once, but the two at the fireplace hesitate, and look at each other. At last they kneel. The Mission Preacher teaches them a short prayer.)

Lay Helper (when all is over). Well, my lads, you look rather more comfortable than when you came.

F. We is, sir.

L. H. This room is open to lads like you every Tuesday and Friday night, at the same hour. Shall we see you again?

F. Is there allays a big fire?

L. H. Yes, when the weather is cold. We are quite willing that you should warm yourselves at it, but what we chiefly want is to teach you things you ought to know.

R. Will that same gemman be here?

L. H. Generally : he, or someone as good.

F. And will them young kids sing ‘There’s a Friend for little children’?

L. H. That, or some other pretty hymn.

F. Then we’ll come.

L. H. Mind you do. Good night.

F. and R. Good night, sir.

F. (*in the street*). I shall say them words when I lays down to-night at Jones’.

R. So shall I. For, Foxey, arter all, there may p’r’aps be a Friend for little children, and big ’uns too, high up yonder.

COLLOQUY THE TWENTIETH.

*THE BISHOP AND THE ARCHDEACON.*SCENE : *The Palace Library.*

A. I have heard you say, bishop, that you consider the present power and influence of the pulpit to be unsatisfactory. Do you then consider that the average standard of preaching has been materially lowered of late years?

B. I suppose that there is scarcely anyone with fewer opportunities of deciding that question than a bishop. When he attends the services of a parish church, it is generally to preach and not to hear. On a few exceptional occasions he listens to exceptional preachers. I often wish I could drop, without notice, and in a private capacity, into the different churches of my diocese, and find out

how my clergy really preach. But if I am to answer your question in accordance with impressions arrived at in various ways, and through very different channels, I should say that the average standard of preaching in the English Church is on the whole raised.

A. Then how do you account for what I am sure I have heard you call the diminished efficacy of sermons ?

B. While the average standard of preaching has decidedly improved, the habit of hearing has most emphatically deteriorated.

A. I fear it has ; yet in what way is it to be explained ? One would think that the progress of education ought distinctly to encourage and facilitate attention to sermons. It is far easier for an educated person to take in what is said by a preacher than one who is uneducated.

B. Yes, but there are other facts and conditions at work which have broken down that theoretical advantage. There are, to begin with, the ecclesiastical proclivities of the age.

Half a century ago the sermon was looked upon as by far the most important feature in church-going. I remember how carefully I was trained, as a boy, in listening to sermons and how little in the use of other portions of the service. The great Anglo-Catholic revival which has effected such prodigious alteration in our feelings and habits has dislodged the sermon from its position of pre-eminence, and placed it below worship and the sacraments.

A. Surely that was a good thing.

B. That was a good thing ; but the reaction, like most reactions in this frail world of ours, seems to have carried people too far. Of late our juniors are rarely trained or encouraged to listen to sermons at all. Our seniors have not only wrested them from a false and untenable altitude, but have ceased to assign them that position in the economy of grace to which they are justly entitled.

A. Perhaps so. The difference in the popular tone within my recollection is certainly

wonderful. The talk used to be—Is your clergyman a good preacher? It is now—does your clergyman adopt the eastward position? Have you a surpliced choir? Do you chant the psalms? What psalter and hymnal do you use?

B. Foremost, too, among the factors hostile to preaching, I should place the marvellous development of the public press. There was a time, not so far ago, when the Sunday sermon was almost the only intellectual food which the majority of the population had the means of enjoying. Just think of the difference at the present moment! Think how the intellectual appetite is actually gorged and drenched by the provision meted out to it! Think of the newspapers, the magazines, the cheap novels, the miscellaneous literature of all sorts and descriptions! The Sunday sermon, instead of being the main item, is now but a comparatively small one of what is poured, week by week, into the minds and imaginations of our people.

A. That is very true. Statistics on these subjects are most startling, whether general or local. Take my own village. Only a few years since the one daily paper brought into the place was delivered at the rectory. There are now regularly delivered from twenty to thirty copies of the daily papers, besides a very large number of weekly ones. Magazines are taken in at nearly every house, and novel-reading among farmers and tradespeople is the rule instead of the exception. All this is in addition to the literature lavishly supplied by the village Club and Library, of which I am the president.

B. Then when we survey the character of our popular literature, we find it to be, in a large and rapidly increasing measure, sensational. Our newspapers contain exciting political speeches, hard-fought elections, fires, murders, shipwrecks, races, accidents, athletic sports. Our magazines abound more and more with stories ; and these stories, instead of being pictures of life as we know it, con-

stantly launch out, not merely into the improbable, but the impossible. The public taste is vitiated for the quiet hearing of sermons. They are of course tame after the highly-flavoured viands which have been partaken of during the week.

A. And surely, bishop, amidst the highly-flavoured viands you must include concerts, penny-readings, dramatic performances, and all sorts of popular entertainments.

B. Undoubtedly. In mere sensual attractiveness, how can the pulpit vie with them? Its practical efficacy is further hindered by the jests and the gibes with which it seems to be the modern fashion to pelt sermons. No joke is too stupid and commonplace to be hurled at them, even by men who would shrink from being considered irreligious. Fathers speak lightly of them in the presence of their sons, and mothers in that of their daughters. Such a spirit soon spreads. Irreverence is unfortunately more catching than reverence, and it is surely nothing short

of irreverence persistently to depreciate an ordinance of God's appointment. The chronic talk to which I refer, and which I am afraid pervades all classes and sections of society, leads people to suppose that they are not to be blamed for habits of inattention.

A. All these are serious considerations. It seems impossible to dispute their force. But, bishop, is the present position of the pulpit to be quietly acquiesced in? Are there no methods by which the pulpit can be made the instrument for good which every thoughtful person would wish it to be?

B. It is a far simpler matter to detect a disease than to discover a cure. It seems to me, however, that a great effort should be made to point out the responsibility of hearers. Our Divine Master said to the first preachers of Christianity,—‘He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent me.’ The same is in a measure true of their successors.

A. That is high ground to take up.

B. But is it an inch higher than we are bound to claim? When St. Paul wrote—‘Now we are ambassadors for Christ,’ did the ‘we’ simply mean the great apostle and his contemporaries in the ministry, or did it not rather include their successors in all ages? ‘Ambassadors for Christ!’ An ambassador may possibly turn out to be a despicable fellow: but still, if he comes from a great and good King, he should at least be received with initiatory respect, and his words carefully weighed. It is my firm belief that a special blessing, by no means dependent upon eloquence, or originality, or exceptional gifts of any sort, rests upon reverent and teachable hearers. On the other hand, from my point of view, it is no slight fault to take up that attitude of carping criticism, or of supercilious indifference, which it is thought fine in these days to adopt towards sermons. It becomes downright presumption in the face of the ignorance of doctrine, of Scripture facts, and

of the most elementary Christian ethics, that usually distinguishes the fault-finders. If 'for every idle word a man speaks he shall give an account at the day of judgment,' methinks somewhat will have to be said about every sermon he hears.

A. Your position may be incontestable, but you will never get the generality of people to look upon things in that light. They will always listen to a lively preacher, and will always send their thoughts a wool-gathering before a dull one.

B. And therefore it becomes the ambassadors of Christ to be doubly and trebly careful that the interests of their Master do not suffer from their negligence. If they fail in enforcing attention by the sacredness and authority of their office, then let them try and enforce it by their own personal qualifications. This brings us to the other side of the question. I have already given you my impression that the average standard of preach-

ing in the English Church has on the whole improved. But that is not saying I am satisfied with it. I am not.

A. I thought we should come to that.

B. Pardon me, archdeacon, if, in what I am going to say, I should seem rather to exhibit the enthusiasm of a young man than the calm and sober judgment of an old one. I believe that the English pulpit has a great future before it. It has lost no ground which it may not readily recover. There is not the slightest reason to prevent it disentangling itself from the embarrassments we have been mentioning, and becoming more powerful and influential than ever. In an age of intellectual movement, when so many things are constantly done better than formerly, why should not preaching be done better?

A. You have admitted some sort of improvement.

B. Yes, but not commensurate with the

rate of progress in other and less essential matters. Men of science, men of literature, men of art, men of mechanical invention, can all point with triumph to the prodigious advance made in their various pursuits and studies during the last half-century. We preachers of the Gospel can scarcely point with the same degree of satisfaction to any marked expansion or amelioration in ours.

A. Perhaps not : but are the cases quite identical? In art, science, literature, and mechanism, there would seem to be infinite capacity for development, whereas the Gospel of Christ must always remain the same.

B. If I were entering upon my clerical career, instead of almost closing it, I would try hard to prove, by example as well as by argument, that though the Gospel of Christ must always remain the same, there may be methods of proclaiming and enforcing it specially called for by the age in which we happen to live. Have we discovered those

methods in their application to our own days? That is the question which the younger generation of clergy have to deal with, and which even many of their elders may yet find time to solve with success.

A. You must acknowledge the marked zeal and ability of many of our preachers, especially perhaps of those experienced in Parochial Missions.

B. Yes, but even Mission preachers have much to learn. It is not everyone who undertakes Mission work who is really fit for it, and the very fittest are conscious of an ideal from which they are a long way distant. Let me add that I should be sorry to see the exceptional and often emotional style of Mission preaching introduced as a common practice into our ordinary services.

A. I should much like to hear your lordship's conception as to what parochial sermons ought really to be.

B. And I should much like to be able to give you a conception worth hearing, but fear

my ideas are far too cloudy and indistinct. Speaking generally, I am sure the parochial clergy should remember that if while 'the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud,' God's Word 'returns unto Him void,' the fault cannot be in God's Word, but must needs be either in the preachers or the hearers. With the strong probability that it is not exclusively in the hearers, the preachers should endeavour, first to discover, and then to remove, whatever causes on their part contribute to produce failure. They should pray for a greater love of souls. They should strive after closer consistency of conduct. They should cultivate a more intelligent study of the Bible. They should be on their guard against mannerism, artificiality, and every other trick of style or delivery which impedes the acceptance of their message. All their experience of human nature, all their observation of the times, all their knowledge of their own heart,

all their acquaintance with the special circumstances of their parish, should be brought to bear upon the matter in hand. And then they should recollect that while they may reasonably profit by the best models of every age, the sort of sermon required by our own may perchance be different to any. Would the parliamentary speeches of the beginning of the century be successful in the present day? Would the leading articles of newspapers? Would the educational works, the volumes of fiction, the papers in magazines? May not a corresponding alteration be demanded, I do not say in the teaching, but in the structure and management of our sermons? 'But all this,' says the hard-working priest, 'means an amount of time which I am really unable to give. I have fifty other things to do, besides preparing for the pulpit. My sermons are frequently the product of an aching head and a weary brain.' Now I am not sure that the various claims upon the attention of the clergy, many and conflicting as I

know them to be, are always adjusted with a wise regard to their relative importance. Most certainly preaching should take a very high place indeed. Aching heads and weary brains ought not to be brought to the performance of *that* duty. To knock about a parish, performing multitudinous kindly offices which, however useful, might equally well be entrusted to lay hands, is scarcely a sufficient justification for a bald Sunday sermon. Someone defined genius to be an unlimited capacity for taking pains. Let but the clergy take real and continuous pains with their preaching, instead of allowing it to fall into the groove of conventionality and routine, and I believe the reproach might be rolled away which now, beyond all question, broods over and depresses our Church, namely, that her ministers have not got the ears of their people. My own day, archdeacon, is nearly over. I find my voice failing me, and my powers of expression, as far as I ever had any, more and more uncertain. But I trust I may yet live

to see the beginning, though not the development, of a material alteration in the efficiency and influence of the pulpit. The nation calls for it. The Church requires it. It cannot be longer delayed without danger to both.

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